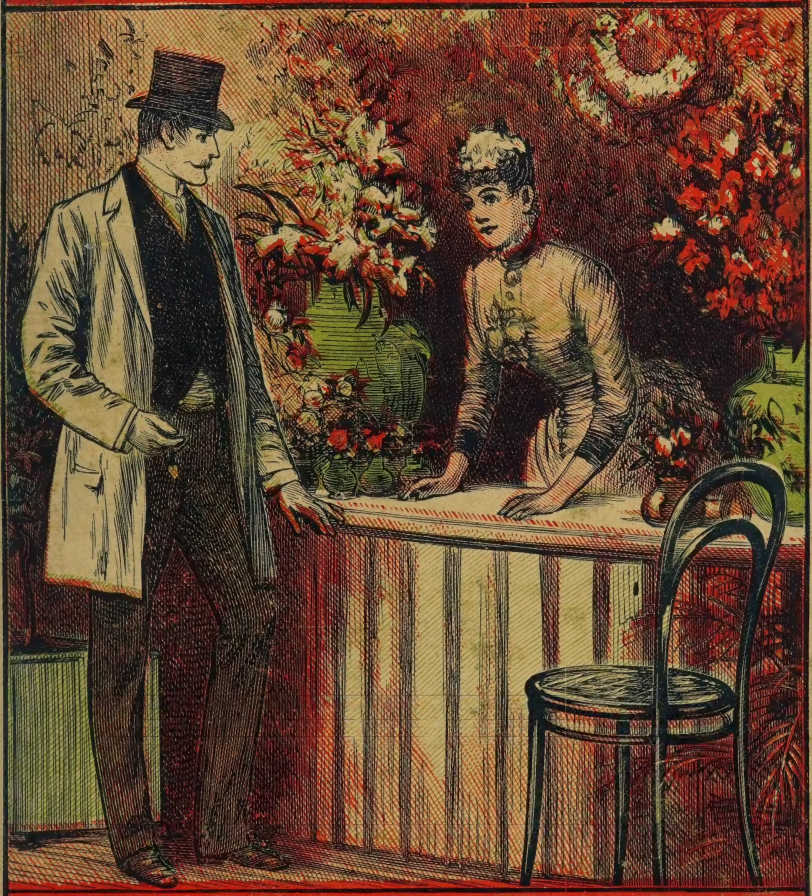
BY THE AUTHOR OF "ROBERT-LE-DIABLE" &

FLEURETTE



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Eugene Scribe (1791-1861), dramatist, was the son of a Paris silk mercer. His complete works fill 76 vols. He is said to have realized the largest fortune ever acquired by a French author. The translator, Frank P. Clark, is unknown.

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FLEURETTE

AFTER THE FRENCH OF

EUGENE SCRIBE

BY

FRANK P. CLARK

Author of "Robert-le-Diable," "The Glass of Water," "Piquillo Alliago," etc.

LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, ST. BRIDE STREET, LUDGATE CIRCUS

AND

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FLEURETTE

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

On a beautiful morning in October, 1858, the inhabitants of Paris who loved air and sunshine had come to seek them at the *Tuilleries* and the *Champs Elysee*. These were the only possible promenades for them. They had not then, as now, forests, meadows and fountains in the very heart of the city. The *Bois de Boulogne* had not, as yet, been transformed, as if by magic, into a Parisian park, a popular pleasure ground which equals in splendor and elegance the domains of kings.

The principal avenue of the *Champs Elysee* was occupied by carriages and equestrians; the walks were crowded with pedestrians, male and female, and all along the sides of the avenue several rows of chairs, exposed to the glare and dust, were ready to receive those who desired to rest. At intervals numerous groups had formed, a thousand different conversations crossed one another. The *Champs-Elysee* had become a vast *salon*, shaded by trees, where Parisian babble replaced the chatterings of absent birds.

Two young men descended from their horses, gave them to their grooms, and looked around for chairs in which to seat themselves. They advanced with heads erect, cigars in their mouths, satisfied with the fine weather, with the sun,

above all with themselves and the effect they produced. It was not their conversation, for they had not said a word; they spoke not, neither did they think!—they *smoked:* but there was something in their figures, their attitudes, their least gestures that implied such good opinions of themselves that the clouds of smoke in the centre of which they advanced seemed less puffs of tobacco than of incense which they sent up to themselves.

They stopped at length near the *rond-point*, at a place where a group of ladies with their backs to the new arrivals already occupied a dozen chairs, leaving however several vacant.

"Ludovic!" cried one of the young men, "I pitch my camp here."

"Take care, Vicomte!" replied the other, in a low tone, at the same time casting a rapid glance over the group of ladies from among whom several dowagers arose; "you mistake; these are ladies. Let us not stop."

"And why not, if you please, my son?" said, turning around, a lady of apparently fifty years, richly and elegantly dressed in irreproachable taste.

"My mother!" exclaimed Ludovic, little pleased at this unexpected encounter.

"Madame Durussel," said respectfully the vicomte, throwing away his cigar and saluting his friend's mother and the ladies who surrounded her.

Ludovic took in the situation at a glance. It was desperate, and retreat impossible, so he decided to make the best of it, and advanced resolutely towards the feminine battalion, the chairs of which were formed in a half-moon, a circular line difficult to break through. He marched straight to the centre. Two chairs there remained vacant. He established himself under the very fire of the enemy, to use military parlance. The vicomte, appreciating the danger of his friend, came generously to his assistance.

Madame Durussel, who occupied the extreme right of the line of battle, was a woman who had been very beautiful and very rich. She was still very rich. Her husband, an old jeweller, had gained by his trade an immense fortune, which he had left to his widow and to his only son Ludovic.

which he had left to his widow and to his only son Ludovic.

The latter, brought up very strictly by his mother, had contracted the habit of obeying and fearing her, a habit which he had instinctively preserved. His first movement was one of submission, his second revolt. We have seen him influenced by the former.

Madame Durussel, after the death of her husband, had continued his business, ennobling it. She would only sell to the Court, of which she was made jeweller. She passed her life in the great world. She had seen the carriages of sovereigns stationed at her door, and princesses seated in her *salons*. Since she had been called upon for wedding jewels by the courts of England and Russia she treated as between equals with the other crowned heads, and made cheap of the little princes of the German Confederation, or simple Italian Grand Dukes.

One does not frequent such splendors with impunity, or mingle during thirty years, even indirectly, with the glories and vanities of this lower world without there being some traces of it. Madame Durussel had so often seen Highnesses and great ladies in private, she had conversed with them so familiarly, that it was difficult for her to persuade herself that she was not of the same society, the same world, almost the same rank. She did not consider herself a jeweller, but a speculator in the diamond courts. She had not shops, but *salons*.

Having become almost too rich, she retired from business, selling her stock to her chief clerk, who, less vain, sold indiscriminately to the city and the court and marched, by a double road, to fortune. Madame Durussel, having no longer anything to do but dream, had at first formed ambitious plans for herself. A widow, she had desired to re-marry and become a great lady.

But the name of Madame Durussel, court jeweller, was already too famous for a marriage with her to pass unnoticed, or for a marquis or a duke to espouse her *incognito*. Her renown itself interfered with her ambition. Love only could excuse such a folly, but at Madame Durussel's age love is not kindled even at the fire of diamonds.

Abandoning these ideas of nobility, the ambitious widow transferred them all to her son. She could not, indeed,

make him a nobleman, but she could, with her fortune, secure his entrance into a great family.

Ludovic, now of age, had no suspicion of the anxiety his mother gave herself on his account. In the first place, he had no thought of marriage. He found far too many charms in the life of a bachelor. He was neither very good nor very bad, neither a fool nor a genius, neither generous nor avaricious. He was a representative young man of the day: for him the club took the place of society, the cigar of conversation, and the fashionable or sporting journal which he glanced over in the morning supplied him with ideas for the day.

He had studied ten years, and knew nothing—unless it was that he was rich, and that was sufficient for him. Already convinced by experience that wealth would secure him both consideration and friends, he took no pains to acquire them, they came of themselves. As to lofty sentiments, and generous ideas—those iders formerly met with in youth; as to enthusiasm or exaltation of feeling, it was useless to ask them of him. Neither he nor his companions found any use for such things. They were not comprehended in the catalogue of the club.

Madame Durussel had met at the springs of Vichy, where she had spent the last season, the Marquise de Kéroualle, a name celebrated in Brittany. The Kéroualles were of the oldest and most illustrious nobility of that country. They reckoned among their ancestors the famous duchess of Portsmouth, Mademoiselle de Kéroualle, mistress of Charles II., King of England, and it was not she, of all their ancestors, of whom the Kéroualles were least proud. They only saw, in her, an incontestable historical fact, an alliance with the Stuarts, a royal branch to add to their genealogical tree.

Besides her nobility the dowager marquise de Kéroualle had a handsome fortune, amounting to nearly a million. With that one is rich in Brittany, though not in Paris. First of all, this million was invested in land, which yielded, at most, an income of thirty six thousand francs, and then the marquise had three daughters—three daughters to marry and endow!

Madame Durussell had said to herself:

"It will go hard if I don't find a wife there for my son Ludovic."

Foiled in her matrimonial enterprises undertaken against princely domains and ducal mansions, she descended to marchionesses, and hoped to succeed. Here, indeed, there were chances for her. She found no difficulty in forming the acquaintance of this noble family.

At Vichy, as at all such resorts, acquaintances are quickly formed. The habit of meeting every day at the baths, or on the promenade — idleness, inaction, *ennui*, readily bring about connections which are as readily forgotten, but which at first sight seem sometimes so cordial that one might take them for real friendships. It is all very simple; during the twenty days which the season generally lasts everyone shows his best side. People have no time to develop any but their good qualities, there is no opportunity to expose their defects.

The Marquise de Kéroualle and Madame Durussel had, therefore, come away mutually enchanted, promising, without fail, to see each other at Paris; and, an exception to the general rule, they had kept their word.

The marquise, though as noble as it was possible to be—that is to say thoroughly despising the common herd, and above all things *trade*—since the death of her husband was confronted with the prospect of three daughters to marry, and had somewhat modified the strictness of her principles. The age, in her eyes, had sunk so low that despairing, for the future, of being able to elevate it to her own level, she had finally decided to descend a little to meet it.

She saw so many *mésalliances* about her that to contract one with trade or finance did not shock her as it might have done formerly. Her heraldic conscience was ready to come to terms with Madame Durussels millions. There was in the veins of the Kéroualles such an ocean of noble blood that a few waves from the Pactolus could not corrupt it.

It should be mentioned that the three daughters, whose future awakened the maternal solicitude, were not goods of ready sale, and that their charms of face and character failed to supplement the eight or ten thousand *livres* of income which was all they could bring by way of dowry.

Elodie, the eldest, was nineteen, with clear blue eyes,

pale lips and complexion, and hair of the lightest blonde imaginable. Her looks promised insipidity, and her conversation fulfilled the promise.

Géraldine, the second, was unmistakably red-headed, but made up for this slight defect by the most pliant and conciliating temper. She always agreed with the last speaker. "*Very true*," "*very just*," "*certainly*," were the only words ever heard from her mouth, and when she was silent she supplied her part of the conversation with an approbative pantomime. For the rest, she was a good girl, and the best of the family,

Corentine, the third, much younger than her sisters, already gave promise of a spiteful and haughty disposition; in other respects she was the gayest child one could possibly see. She was always laughing without knowing why.

Finally, there was another inconvenience in connection with the Mesdemoiselles de Kéroualle which every day threatened to increase, and already interfered somewhat with the plans of the marquise.

A cousin of hers, of another branch of the Kéroualles, had been left an orphan at the age of four, and moreover, in consequence of revolutionary misfortunes, was without patrimony.

The Marquise de Kéroualle, with the warm approval of all his connections, who found themselves relieved thereby, was moved to bring home the young cousin and rear her as his own child. But Clotilde, who for a long time had been only an insignificant little girl, was now fifteen, and already her beautiful black hair, her large dark eyes, so gentle and expressive, the elegance of her form, the charm of her whole person, formed a striking and dangerous contrast to the appearance of her cousins. She already presented a type of beauty so perfect and regular, that, wherever she appeared there were eyes but for her.

The marquise could not always however, leave her little cousin alone at the hotel with the domestics. It was necessary to take her out, which she did from time to time, but as seldom as possible.

Clotilde, for instance, was excluded from all *soirées* and state ceremonials under the pretext that the family carriage, large as it was, would not hold five ladies in ball costume.

As to morning promenades it was different. At the risk of rumpling their dresses, people may crowd themselves a little; and the marquise, with her two oldest daughters, installed herself at the back, while Corentine and Clotilde were seated gaily in front.

And thus it happened that on this day, invited by a beautiful autumn sun, the Kéroualle family found themselves in the *Champs Elysée.* Their ancient coach, with armorial panels, had met the elegant *coupé* of Madame Durussel. The ladies, after half an hours promenade, had quitted their carriages to seat themselves near the *rond-point,* along the avenue, into which ambuscade Ludovic and his friend, the Vicomte de Grancey, had just fallen, and from which there was now no decent retreat.

"*Parbleu!*" cried the vicomte, accepting boldly the situation and commencing the attack—"a fine day ladies."

"Very fine," said Madame Durussel.

"Very fine," said the Marquise.

"Very fine," repeated Elodie, with a melancholy air.

"Very true," echoed Géraldine, who had never contradicted anyone in her life.

As to Corentine, she answered with a shout of laughter. Why?—we have just said she never gave a reason to anyone else, any more than to herself, for her attacks of gaiety.

I know not if the conversation, which began under such difficulty, would have been sustained in a manner equally *piquante* and interesting, had it not been all at once interrupted by a new arrival—a young girl, in a tattered linen dress, approached and stood near the vicomte's chair. A Madras handkerchief, from which the colors had long since faded, enveloped in picturesque fashion, a mass of blonde hair, part of which fell in curls upon the child's half-naked shoulders. Her pale, gaunt face bore traces of misery and suffering, but the coverings to her feet constituted the most original portion of her toilet. One of her feet was shod in a lady's boot, the other with a shoe fastened by a double string. This young girl had a mournful but resigned air, and, in her eyes, the color of which it was difficult to determine, shone resolution and intelligence.

"Go away!" said the vicomte, annoyed at seeing her near his chair.

"Yes," cried Ludovic, "they should not allow beggars in the centre *allees*."

"I am no beggar!" said the young girl, raising her head proudly.

"What *are* you then?" demanded the vicomte.

"A *marchande*," she replied, as, reaching forward her right hand, which she had kept concealed behind her skirt, she showed three or four small bouquets of violets, more or less fresh, which she presented to the vicomte.

He made a gesture of contempt.

The young "*marchande*" then advanced towards Ludovic, presenting her flowers.

"Leave me!" said the young man, repulsing her with the tips of his gloved fingers; "first go and wash your hands, which are not in good condition."

The child made no answer, and even appeared not to hear, but the faint flush, which instantly suffused her pale cheeks, proved that the insult had reached her heart. She made a step towards the ladies, and offered them her bouquets in silence.

"No thanks," said the marquise, with a severe air.

"Don't disturb me," said Madame Durussel.

The young girl then turned toward the four young ladies, whom she passed in review in a single glance, and stopping before Clotilde she made a little courtesy of confidence, which seemed to say: "you alone understand me."

She was not mistaken, Clotilde took a bouquet.

"Ah! Clotilde!" cried Elodie, with disgust—"can you think of it? Those violets are horrid!"

"Very true," said Géraldine.

Corentine laughed.

"And besides," said the Marquise, "look at the girl; she is scarcely dressed."

"An additional reason," replied Clotilde; "I am rich—you gave me my month's allowance this morning. How much? she asked, turning with a pleasant look to the "*marchande*."

"What you please, mademoiselle."

"That is not dear," laughed Corentine.

"Very true," said Géraldine.

"Not at all," cried the vicomte, "she is speculating on your generosity."

"Two sous," said the young girl quickly.

Clotilde took from her purse a small piece of silver and gave it to her.

"I have no change," said the *marchande*," with an embarrassed look.

"Keep the whole," answered Clotilde, then regarding her with interest, "How old are you?"

"Thirteen or fourteen, I believe, mademoiselle—I do not know exactly."

"What is your father's occupation?"

"I have lost him—my mother also."

"What did they do?"

"I do not know, they came from Switzerland."

"Then, of course, you're called 'Lisbeth,'" said Ludovic, laughing.

"No, sir, my name is Marie."

"Ah! how common!" said the vicomte; "everybody bears that name. If I were you, in order to make a fortune, I would change my name."

"I ask nothing better, if anyone will give me another." While thus speaking the large eyes of the young girl were turned on Clotilde.

"Since you sell flowers," said the latter, smiling, "call yourself *Fleurette*."

"Thanks, god-mother," replied the child with an expressive look.

"She's no fool," said the marquise.

"There is often intelligence among these children of the common people," remarked Madame Durussel, with a patronising air. "Have you no other occupation than this?"

"No, madame."

"And how does it suffice to procure your subsistence?"

"It doesn't," replied the child quietly; "the days I gain nothing I eat nothing."

At this moment the sun began to set, the air became very fresh, and the ladies hurriedly put on their wraps.

"And you," said Corentine, laughing, to the flower-girl, with your torn linen gown—how do *you* feel?"

"I am cold, mademoiselle," replied the girl with an indifferent air.

"Where do you live?" inquired Clotilde in a whisper.

"I don't know—where I can. When the day is fine, like *this*, godmother," and she passed the coin which Clotilde had given her through her fingers, "I lodge with Madame Beaurin."

"Who is Madame Beaurin?" cried Ludovic.

"A portress who gives me soup in the evening, and a bed at night; provided I bring her ten sous a day, but when I cannot—the door is closed."

Clotilde uttered an exclamation.

"And you sleep in the open air—without supper?"

"In the spring that does very well, but autumn and winter come on—. If I had only something ahead—to establish myself with."

"To buy stock with?" said Ludovic, with a laugh.

"Yes, sir, to buy and pay down for beautiful flowers, like these, but, living with difficulty from day to day, I can lay by nothing."

"And how much is needed to establish you?" asked Clotilde.

"A considerable sum, ten or a dozen francs, at least."

"Here are twenty," cried Clotilde, who had kept her purse in her hand—"my month's allowance."

"What are you doing there, mademoiselle?" exclaimed the marquise, in a severe tone.

"I wish it to be said, cousin, that I, who have never had a chance to establish myself, have once in my life contributed to establish *some one else*."

"Do you not see that, to play on your feelings, you have been told the same story that is told to everybody?"

"And of which you are the dupe," added the vicomte.

"And be sure not to boast of it, mademoiselle," said Ludovic; "you would be laughed at."

Pending this discussion the little "*marchande*" had approached Clotilde, and blushing, but without speaking a word, returned the gold pieces, which Clotilde pushed back vigorously.

Elodie raised her eyes, Corentine broke into a laugh, and the marquise, with a frown at her daughters, said in an icy tone:

"Let us go, mesdemoiselles, the weather is uncertain, and it begins to grow cold."

Ludovic, carrying his gallantry to the extreme, offered the marquise his arm, the vicomte did the same to Madame Durussell, the four young ladies walked, arm in arm, behind; and thus the squadron took up the line of march for the carriages. Clotilde, who got into their coach last, turned for an instant and saw behind her Fleurette, who had followed. She carried to her lips the gold-piece which she owed to the generosity of her godmother.

CHAPTER II.

"Say what they will," murmured Clotilde, seating herself in the front of the carriage—"Say what they will, the gold piece I gave the flower-girl is money well placed."

"Close the window," said the marquise; "we shall take cold."

In hastening to obey her cousin Clotilde again saw Fleurette, who had approached the carriage and was endeavoring to catch sight of the crest on the panel.

The coachman plied his whip and the horses started, Clotilde uttered a cry.

Fleurette had barely missed being run over.

Our heroine had drawn back just in time; she had only escaped, by a few inches, being thrown down and run over by the wheels.

Without reflecting on the danger she had run, Fleurette, who was not to be frightened at such a trifle, rushed after the carriage, which she followed for more than ten minutes. She hoped to overtake it, and know by the arms upon it, the name and family of her godmother.

But her strength disappointed her courage; panting, out of breath, with the energetic will that formed the basis of her character, with hair dishevelled, she continued her pursuit, when fortune declared decisively against her and compelled her to halt. The strings which secured her shoe all at once broke, and it was impossible for her to continue barefooted, over the short pebbles, a race which had already

exhausted her. So she was forced to give up the attempt to discover who her young benefactress was, but she did not give up thinking of, and blessing her.

From that day she invoked no other guardian angel, and to none other addressed—not her prayers—for Fleurette did not pray, but her souvenirs, her dreams, and her plans. A veritable bohemian; no relative, no friend upon earth had ever yet extended her a hand; and, without direction in her wandering life, she advanced at hazard, as likely to take the right as the wrong course.

She walked along, singing, with a light and joyous step, contemplating her golden piece, which she could not cease admiring. She had never before possessed such a treasure; surely it must be inexhaustible; and, like *Perette* in the fable of the *milk-pail*, she built on her gold piece a series of castles in the air, each more splendid than the rest.

First of all, she would buy at a bargain a suitable dress and bonnet, and especially shoes, with which she might present herself in good society, that is to say before the entrance to the Opera or the *Théatre Italien* from which the police had always hitherto sent her away. She would purchase in the morning, of a flower-gardener in a distant *faubourg*, beautiful bouquets suitable to the season, for which she would pay cash and therefore get much cheaper, and which she would sell again in the evening for the best price she could get.

She would speculate on a small quantity at first; then, by degrees, she would extend her trade, and build up a custom. Then, after some years of economy, she would take a small shop on the boulevard. A secret instinct told her that she would one day be handsome, that she would have business tact, and would make a pretty and clever flower-merchant, whose shop would be much frequented by great ladies, and especially by young gentlemen.

While thus dreaming, she had gone down the avenue of the *Champs Élysées*, turned to the left, traversed the *rue du Faubourg, Saint Honoré*, and entered the *rue de la Pepinière*, which she followed throughout its length. Having reached its junction with the *rue du Rocher*, the *rue Saint Lazare*, and the *rue de l'Arcade*, she saw a crowd of people.

A boy sixteen or seventeen years old, whom one would hardly have taken for more than twelve, so thin and puny did he appear, going along with his nose in the air, or staring at the passers-by, had stepped in a hole left by a missing flag-stone and fallen down. His fall had been more noisy than dangerous. By his box, in which had been several panes of glass, it was easy to be seen that he was a glaziers apprentice. The crash of the breaking glass had attracted the attention of those passing, and the jingle of the scattered fragments which surrounded the poor fellow, at first excited apprehensions that he might be injured. So they hastened to help him up. No people are naturally more obliging than the Parisians.

But when it was discovered that he had not received even a scratch, and that it was only a matter of some broken glass, every one went his way, thinking only of his own affairs; and several of those Parisian youngsters who seem, at every accident, to spring up as if from the ground, and who, in every catastrophe, see only a subject for jest, went away laughing and saluting the young glazier as a member of the *Court of Cassation.**

Fleurette arrived just as the poor boy had gotten upon his feet. Standing alone, in the midst of the ruin, he contemplated his misfortune, but not with dry eyes, for he had begun to weep. Fleurette ran to him.

"What is the matter?—are you hurt?"

"I do not know; I believe I am."

"Pshaw!—that is nothing to cry for."

"But I was carrying some goods, and on returning to the shop I am sure to be beaten."

"What does it signify!" replied Fleurette in a hardy tone; "people are beaten without crying."

The boy wiped his eyes, and, looking at her with a timid glance, as if ashamed of his weakness in the presence of one of such masculine courage, and seeking to excuse himself, he stammered:

"My master, who is strong, and big, and brutal, will require me to pay, and, as I am not able, he will first beat me and then turn me out of doors, and then I don't know what will become of me."

* A play on the word "casser" to break."

"You have never, then, slept under a gate?"

"No."

"Nor in the open street?"

"Never."

"I imagine, then, that the idea frightens you."

"I well believe it—without considering that I came out without my dinner, and that he will send me away without supper—I may count on that."

And the boy again began to weep.

"Be silent," said Fleurette, in a tone of authority—"it makes me sick to see a man cry. How much do you earn a day?"

"Nothing, as yet. I was finishing my apprenticeship. It is only at the end of the month that I am to begin to earn wages."

"And what was the value of the goods you had there?"

"They were large window-panes, though they don't look it now," he said, casting a despairing look at the fragments scattered around him; "there were six or seven francs' worth of them."

"As much as that!" cried Fleurette, handling her gold-piece.

Her first impulse, one generous and charitable, which had prompted her to ask this question, was suddenly checked by the magnitude of the sum, which disarranged all her plans and combinations. However, remembering how very happy the unexpected generosity of her godmother had recently made her, she took the gold-piece from her pocket, impressed by I know not what secret presentiment that the pleasure which she had just experienced, in receiving, might be surpassed by one still sweeter, that of giving.

"Let us understand one another," she said, for Fleurette was a girl who had a good head as well as a good heart, and who to mother-wit added a capacity for business; "if one lent you six francs, would you repay them?"

"Lend six francs to *me!*—who would venture to do that?"

"But if there *are* bold people who are not afraid, would you repay them?"

"There are few chances of it," he answered artlessly; "but"—

"But there *are* chances; in the first place, your honesty."

"Oh! yes—and then," he added earnestly, "my gratitude."

"That is already something. Well," said Fleurette, as if she had just come to a decision, "I will lend you six francs."

"You!" exclaimed the boy, regarding her with an incredulous air—"you are not even as well dressed as I am."

"It is not always safe to judge by appearances," answered Fleurette sententiously. "Pick up these fragments, there may be those who will find use for them, and wait for me."

A few steps away, in the *rue de l'Arcade*, was an open pastry shop, where sat a young and pretty shop-woman, Fleurette entered, made a courtesy, and laying the napoleon on the counter said:

"Madame, can you give me change?"

The woman looked at her curiously.

"Do you think I have stolen it?" said the girl, lifting her head proudly.

"No, but I am surprised—"

"At my offering a gold piece to be changed?'

"Yes."

"Ah! if I could, I should keep it always, for it must bring good luck. In receiving it from the handsome young lady who gave it, I vowed to myself to employ it well—and I begin. Stay," she said to the boy who remained at the door, not presuming to enter, "what is your name?"

"Etienne."

"There is what will prevent your being beaten and driven away;" and she put the six francs in his hand.

While he remained stupefied, looking at the money and scarcely believing it real, Fleurette carefully gathered up the rest of her change, not forgetting to thank the shop-woman, who locked the gold piece in her drawer, and saying, as she saw it disappear!

"Madame, I beg of you to put that in a corner by itself."

"Why?"

"If I am ever rich, I shall come to reclaim it."

The young woman looked at the poor child, and replied with a smile!

"I promise it."

And Fleurette, happy at having left her gold piece where she was certain of one day finding it again, left the shop, her heart filled with a joy hitherto unknown — that of having rendered a service.

She walked along the street by the side of her young *protegé*, who looked upon her with a gratitude bordering on respect.

Fleurette was the first to speak.

"Who is your master?"

"M. Dufour, glazier, near the *barrière Blanche*."

"That is my quarter—when I have one. Madame Beaurin, my portress, lives in the *rue de Navarin*. And your father and mother, what is their employment?"

"They have none. They are dead. We are orphans, my sister Michelette and I. Fortunately the ladies of the Society for indoor relief of the second district discovered us in the garret in which we were dying of hunger; and then we were apprenticed for two years, I to M. Dufour, master glazier, and Michelette to an artificial flower-maker."

"And you work?"

"All the week, and Michelette, too, Heavens! how tiresome it is to work! So that when I am sent out for an hour on business, as to-day, I stay two."

"You see that brings misfortune."

"Possibly; but to be idle, and take the air, is to do as rich people do, and is so amusing."

"Not always, especially when it rains, I have often regretted not having the shelter of a shop, like you."

"What are you then?"

"An out-door flower-girl."

"And your name?"

"Fleurette."

"A funny name."

"It's a new name. I received it today, and I shall never have any other, for my godmother's sake."

"You have been baptized, then?"

"Just now, out of doors—always out of doors!"

"How curious! Then you are like my sister and me, you have never known your parents."

"Yes indeed! I remember them—they were peasants.

We lived in a cottage of pine boards in a country called Switzerland, where it was very cold. There was a great mountain all covered with snow which I used to run over; and then there were clusters of beautiful red flowers which I gathered, and every day I made bouquets and crowns of them, and it is from that that I love flowers so much."

"And that is why you took to this business?"

"Yes, later, for my father and mother came to Paris, for what reason I cannot tell, probably to hire themselves as porters, or rather as *suisses*, as they are called."

"And they brought you with them?"

"Of course; I must have been then seven or eight years old; and all at once I saw no more of them, and found myself in a porter's lodge with Madame Beaurin, who beat me; but I did not cry," she added, with a glance at Etienne. "She beat me whenever I failed to bring her ten sous, and turned me out of doors. I have passed bad days and worse nights; but now that I am rich Madame Beaurin will make no difficulty in receiving me."

Conversing thus Fleurette and her new friend reached the last third of the *rue Saint Lazare;* then turning to the left they began to ascend the *rue Blanche.* At the head of the *rue Boursault* Fleurette stopped.

"Let us part here," she said. "That is my way," pointing to the right; "continue your own. Besides the night is coming on, and I am not expected at Madame Beaurin's."

"Madame Beaurin, portress, *rue de Navarin*," repeated Etienne, by way of fixing it in his memory; "I shall go and see you, Fleurette."

"I am seldom at home, but come all the same, you shall give me the address of your sister, Michelette. Meanwhile courage and industry!"

"I make no promises—but one can try."

"If it be only to pay your debts. Remember you owe me."

"True, Fleurette; that alone shall hinder me from idling and wasting my time, for you are a brave girl—and if you ever need anyone to defend you you may always count upon me."

"Thanks!—I shall endeavor to defend myself without calling on you,"

"Why?"

"Because I am stronger than you."

"Don't believe it. I'm as strong as a lion when I'm angry."

"In your business one should never get angry."

"How so?"

Because it is a trade too liable to accident, and he who breaks glass must pay for it. Good luck! May we be well received—you by M. Dufour, and I by Madame Beaurin!"

They went their several ways, but not without several times turning for another good-bye.

CHAPTER III.

The house of which Madame Beaurin was portress, or rather proprietor (for she had a way of levying contributions on her lodgers, and in one way or another knew how to make them pay tribute)—this house, newly built, had a five-story front on the street. The rear, reserved for future improvements, consisted of a garden, small and damp, serving meanwhile as a court, and containing but a single structure, a small coach-house or wooden shed, which madame Beaurin used as a storehouse for old lumber.

Some old rabbit-skins hung from a nail; below were a broken straw bottomed chair and a rickety stove; further on, old rags and old papers of every description; a broom-handle and a pair of broken tongs; fragments of plates, bits of broken bottles, and at the back, in the place of honor was piled the porter's fire-wood.

There madame Beaurin had kept her dog Azor, recently lost; and there all the cats in the house and in the neighborhood made their nightly *rendez-vous*.

Madame Beaurin, who had never been amiable, even in her youth, was now sixty; and every year might be said to have added another blemish or disagreeable feature to her

character as it did another wrinkle to her face. Time, which destroys all, had only augmented her distinguishing characteristics—avarice, greed, and above all a vicious temper.

"Ah!" she cried, as she saw, by the light of her lamp, Fleurette present herself at the door of the lodge; "so it's you, idler and vagabond! It's a long time since you have shown yourself!"

"A fortnight, mother Beaurin——I had nothing to pay for food and lodging; so, knowing you, I did not come."

"You did well."

"I didn't want to give you the trouble of turning me out."

"As much as to say that you have the means of paying to-day."

"Yes, mother Beaurin," replied Fleurette proudly.

"And you believe I'll receive you?"

"I hope so."

"Undeceive yourself, then; within a fortnight, since the beginning of the October term, the old lodgers have left and new ones have come, all rich, respectable people. I saw it by the gratuities they gave. That betokens a *permanent*, and puts him on a footing which it is necessary to maintain. So M. Ducresson, the proprietor, has ordered me to be strict in the management of the house, and we do not desire to admit transient and doubtful people."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That I do not wish to let by the day, as formerly; it must be for a month, or at least for a week."

"If that is all," returned Fleurette with a look of offended dignity, "don't trouble yourself."

"But I must trouble myself, in these short rentings, to demand pay in advance, and eight days at fifty *centimes*, per day, come to four francs."

Fleurette's only answer was to throw that amount on the table.

Madame Beaurin was amazed, but, recovering from her surprise, exclaimed: "It seems that within a fortnight we have become a millionaire."

"So you say," coldly replied Fleurette. "Have the soup served, then, but try to have it a little better and

richer than before; otherwise I shall be obliged to find other quarters at the end of the month."

The surprise of the portress was at its height. But as insolence had much more effect upon her than civil treatment, she regarded Fleurette with a sort of deference. Then pushing forward a stool, a thing she had never done before,

"Seat yourself," she said.

Fleurette didn't wait to be pressed, without ceremony she took the proffered seat, of which her wearied limbs felt sorely in need.

"And might one know how this sudden fortune came?"

"No," answered the young girl dryly.

"It is a secret, then—a mystery?"

"Yes."

"And so," continued the portress in a wheedling tone, "you are unwilling to trust this secret to mamma Beaurin, the benefactress who has been a mother to you since the death of your parents, who were in the same business as herself?"

Fleurette remained silent. Then, pointing her finger at the pot before the fire, whence came a pleasant murmur and an exhilarating odor, she said, with a fine-lady air which would have done no discredit to her god-mother:

"Serve up—I am hungry."

Madame Beaurin, more and more subdued, hastened to obey; and during the whole supper, which was not, indeed very long, she left no means untried to draw from Fleurette her story and the cause of her good fortune; but the latter understood that her silence was a species of punishment, and took good care not to satisfy the curiosity of madame Beaurin.

Some moments after, Fleurette retired to her apartment that is to say to the humble dog-hole we have described, and which was situated in the dampest part of the garden. It leaned against the right wing of the house. A gutter spout emptied upon the roof, from which several tiles were missing. The walls, the planks of which were disjointed, permitted glimpses to be caught of the moon, which was shining brightly, but at the same time afforded ingress to a draught of air not very agreeable in the middle of October.

But that did not hinder Fleurette from sleeping soundly

on her coarse couch of straw, two feet wide by four long, which occupied one of the sides of the hovel. Her slumber was disturbed neither by the wind nor the noise, nor by the complaints of the preceding lodgers, who, indignant at finding their quarters occupied, vented their rage in prolonged and furious *mewings*, with which the whole quarter resounded.

Fleurette did not wake till daylight. No sound was yet heard in the house, and the general stillness invited reflection. Her first thought was of her godmother, her second for herself. She carefully scrutinzed her position, which was far from being as promising as it had at first appeared.

She was, it was true, assured of food and lodging for eight days. But an examination of her finances disclosed that she had left to set her up in business only ten francs. This was her entire available capital, for it was needless to count on returns so uncertain as those from the house of *Etienne & Co.*

Ten francs!—without a doubt it was more than she had ever had before; but comparing capital with expenses, she found it impossible to balance her *budget*. First, she had to consider the matter of dressing herself, and then the expense of starting in business. She must buy either a pannier or a basket—a sort of portable shop with which it would be impossible to dispense. Then she must lay in a sufficient amount of suitable stock to furnish her shop, and draw the attention of customers.

It was folly to think of obtaining credit. What security could she offer? What confidence could she inspire?

"Oh! my godmother!" she said, joining her hands, "come to my aid! If you hear me, if you grant my prayer, I shall be a brave girl, I shall conduct myself well, and you shall never repent having given me your protection!"

Having finished this inward prayer, though it was hardly six o'clock, she rose from her bed. No one else in the house, not even the portress, was yet awake. All the windows and blinds were closed. She took a few steps in the garden, still thinking of her godmother. All at once, and in spite of the thick autumn fog which surrounded her, she saw something white at her feet, and stooping she picked up a superb bouquet.

Three white camelias stood out from a compact mass of Parma violets, and a circle of heather surrounded the whole in a manner at once neat and elegant.

We have already said that Fleurette was without faith or religious sentiment. Who was there to instil, or whence was she to imbibe, such sentiment? Everything about her that met her eyes, or her ears, tended rather to lower than to elevate, to corrupt rather than enlighten her mind. But, under the circumstances, an occurence so unforeseen, and which seemed a sudden answer to the vow she had taken, presented the appearence of something supernatural and miraculous, which might well awaken her heart and especially her imagination. Whence had come this bouquet?—who had sent it?—who in the world was there to feel an interest in her, if it was not her godmother?

By a quick and almost involuntary movement she raised the bouquet to her lips. It was moist from the night-dew and the fog which had preserved its freshness. Inspecting it closely it was easy to see that the flowers which composed it had not just been gathered. No difference—Fleurette found them magnificent, and of a value much higher than any she would have been able to purchase to commence her business.

She returned to her hovel, leaving the door open to admit the light, and, gently unwinding the thread that tied the immense bouquet, she divided it, and made a dozen small bouquets of the violets, then a thirteenth composed of the three beautiful camelias alone. She bound them together with the thread which she had wound into a ball, and which she cut with her teeth for the want of scissors. She had no basket in which to carry her goods, but she wrapped them in her handkerchief, and, with bare head, and her beautiful hair falling on her shoulders, without saying "good morning" or "goodbye" to madame Beaurin, who was making coffee in her lodge, she rushed through the carriage-gate which was just then opened.

CHAPTER IV.

Joyous, full of hope, and like the Grecian sage, who carried all his possessions with him, Fleurette walked confidently, under the protection, as she believed, of her godmother, and certain of meeting fortune in the end. We have seen, in our time, more than one millionaire make the same beginning.

In leaving the *rue de Navarin* Fleurette hesitated whether to turn to the right or to the left. Often a whole future depends on the first step.

She turned to the right, went down *la place Breda*, and entered the *rue Labruyere*, meeting only business people who cared little for bouquets. She reached the *rue de la Rochefoucauld*, at the beginning of its descent, here very sudden, and the street seemed to her deserted.

She was mistaken, however. There was one person, a young man, walking first rapidly, then slowly, and then turning back. He was evidently promenading.

Fleurette passed close to him, but he did not see her. He looked at his watch, his countenance betraying at the same time impatience and emotion. Then from the elevated portion of the street, from which he had been careful not to go far, his eye glanced in the direction of the *rue Saint Lazare*, but, like sister Ann, he saw no one coming. There was nobody in the street but himself and Fleurette.

The latter approaching and observing the agitation and disquiet imprinted on his features, addressed him in her gentlest tone:

"*Monsieur*, do you wish some beautiful violets?"

The young man at first repulsed her impatiently; then, reconsidering, he replied:

"Stay, come back, little one—come here."

Probably he thought with Figaro, or the Count Almaviva, that two people talking excite less attention than a single person promenading.

Fleurette opened her handkerchief from which was exhaled a delicate perfume.

"See, *monsieur*, what fragrance!—how beautiful and fresh they are! Be my first customer. See what a charming bouquet!"

He took and attached it to his button-hole, without thinking much of what he did. Then with an absent air he opened his porte-monnaie and took out some silver pieces.

At the same instant he saw a young lady advancing from the *Saint Lazare* and ascending the *rue de La Rochefoucauld*. Her step was light and uncertain. A black veil concealed her face, and from time to time she looked about with an uneasy air.

"There!" cried the young man, throwing the money in his hand into Fleurette's handkerchief, "go!"—and he ran rapidly down the street to meet the lady.

Fleurette, left alone, looked into her handkerchief. There were two one-franc pieces, and three of ten sous.

"Not a bad price for a bouquet of violets!" she said. "The day begins well!"

She went down the street meeting her customer a moment afterwards, to whom she made her best courtesy. He had his bouquet in his button-hole and gave his arm to a young and pretty little blonde, whom he appeared to be reassuring, and who leaned upon his arm trembling violently.

As to the young man, his air of disquiet and concern had been succeeded by one of joy and triumph incomprensible to Fleurette, and of which she made no effort to divine the cause. She was too happy herself.

She entered a bakers and bought a penny loaf, thinking her late good fortune warranted indulging in the luxury of a breakfast, which was something new. She continued her walk, and just as she entered the *rue Saint Georges* she heard two men ahead of her talking earnestly as they went along.

"It's too risky," said one.

"But it's magnificent," replied the other, "if we have only a rise of ten centimes to-day."

"Beautiful violet bouquets, gentlemen!" interrupted Fleurette.

"And we can sell again to-morrow, and realize an immense profit," continued the man from 'change, without hearing her.

"And who says there will be a rise?" said the more timid speculator.

"I'm sure of it!" replied the bolder one.

"Buy my violets," persisted the girl, placing herself before the two, "It will bring you luck."

"Do you think so?" said one of the men.

"I'll answer for it," she returned with confidence.

All gamblers are superstitious. He took the bouquet, threw the girl twenty sous, and hurried rapidly in the direction of the exchange.

Fleurette, delighted with her new transaction, followed him at a distance with her eyes, and continued her course along the *rue Lafitte*, stopping near the boulevard before a handsome shop full of rare and costly hot-house flowers.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, looking through the window at M. Rymbaud enthroned in his office—"if I could only gain enough to hire a shop like that!—if I should one day get to be a wholesale florist! Bah!" she added with a smile in which shone a whole fortune of hope, "who knows?—with the help of my godmother everything is possible!"

While speaking she saw displayed in elegant cases some camelias not any more beautiful than her own; and, as she possessed the instinct of business, the thought of a speculation for the first time came into her mind.

She entered the shop, and presenting her three white camelias said to the proprietor:

"How much will you give me for them?"

"Thirty sous for the three," he answered.

"It's not enough." replied Fleurette boldly.

"Well, to you, and because you seem bright and pretty, I'll give forty."

"Fleurette was reaching out her hand for the money, when an elegant looking young man entered, who, judging from the consideration with which he was received, appeared to be a distinguished customer.

"I want a bouquet for this evening."

"Select one, *monsieur le comte*."

"How much is it?" he answered, pointing with his cane to a white camelia surrounded by violets.

"The usual price."

"Twenty francs?"

The florist nodded.

Very well. Put it in my account, and send it before seven o'clock to mademoiselle Rosine—you know."

"Yes, *monsieur le comte*."

The young man re-entered his carriage, the florist saluting respectfully. The latter then turned to Fleurette,

"Let us finish our affair," he said—"the three flowers for forty sous.

"A piece," replied Fleurette—"that comes to six francs."

"What is it you say?"

"You have just sold for twenty francs a bouquet containing a single camelia neither finer nor fresher than these."

"But a dealer must have his profit."

"I am a dealer also, and if you wish us to do business together you must show a little more conscience."

The florist regarded her with an astonished look, and said:

"She's sharp, and understands herself! If you were a little better dressed," he added, looking at her tattered gown and naked feet, "I might take you to help in the shop."

Not in the least abashed by so brilliant an offer, Fleurette coolly answered:

"I shall think of it, but in the first place pay me."

"The devil!" he said, handing her the money—"then you prefer sticking to your rags?"

"Not that, but to my liberty," she answered, thinking of Etienne; "I do not wish to obey or be a servant to anyone."

And delighted with the excellent bargain she had made she hurried out.

The street was crowded with carriages. Fleurette inquired the cause of an errand-porter, who answered that they were celebrating a great marriage at *Notre dame de Lorette*. Fleurette neglected nothing. She knew there might be opportunities there of profitably disposing of her buquets. Hurrying thither, she arrived just as the ceremony ended.

The bride and groom, surrounded by their friends, had just come out of the church, and were waiting in the vestibule the approach of their carriage, which some servants in livery had gone to bring.

The police kept back the crowd; but eluding their vigilance, and at the risk of being crushed, Fleurette glided between the carriages and horses, and made her way with so much courage and good fortune, that she found herself close to the carriage of the new married couple at the moment they were entering it."

A police sergeant pushed her back, saying;

"What are you doing there?"

"My compliments to the bride," she answered making a little courtesy, "and my marriage present," she added, throwing a bouquet of violets into the carriage.

It was done so prettily and gracefully that the young lady cried:

"I, too, wish to make my present." But in her grand wedding costume, she had no money about her. Her husband opened his purse, from which she took a five franc piece and threw it to the flower-girl.

"Thanks, madame," she cried; "it will bring you luck."

"With a glad heart she added this unexpected treasure to that which she possessed already; and as property rendered her neither giddy nor forgetful she did not leave the church steps till the whole wedding party had entered their carriages and departed.

She managed to sell three or four more bouquets, but at the usual price. The extraordinary demand had ceased, and violets, which had gone up temporarily, fell back to the normal figure.

She retured toward the boulevard, crossed it, and ventured into the *rue Richelieu.*

On reaching the corner of the *rue de la Bourse* she saw in the middle of a group of talkers a man with an animated countenance and a loud voice, who had the proud and important look which accompanies good fortune. Fleurette recognized him as one of the two speculators she had met that morning in the *rue Saint Georges;* and guessed without difficulty that he had succeeded in the hazardous stroke which he had meditated.

"Well!" said she, pulling the skirt of his coat, and placing herself boldly before him—"well, what did I tell you?"

"True enough!" he answered, with the loud laugh of a

millionaire, "the *bohemienne* was right. She has proved a true prophetess. A rise of *fifteen centimes*—it's a fortune!"

"Then divide between us," said Fleurette gayly.

"No," returned the speculator; "it's a fortune not yet realized, and which to-morrow I may lose. No matter, I wish the day, for you, to be a happy one."

He slipped into her hand a ten-franc piece.

"The day is, indeed, happy!" cried Fleurette, whose heart leaped with joy, and with an effusion of gratitude she murmered to herself:

"Thanks, my godmother!"

She had still some bouquets left, and did not wish to go home without selling them. It was now night, and at the entrances of the Vaudeville and the Varieties she disposed of the last.

Having received her money and finished her day she turned toward the *rue de Navarin*, taking, in her way, the *rue du Faubourg Montmartre*.

Her good fortune had so surpassed her hopes that she felt privileged to depart somewhat from her ideas of rigid economy. and think a little of her comfort. Her naked feet, especially, needed shoes. In her active, out-door life they were not a superfluity, but things of the very first necessity.

She bought a pair of strong shoes, and a ready-made gown of durable and simple stuff. The only luxury she allowed herself was a little bonnet of dark linen, with blue ribbons, which gave her a jaunty and original air.

Madame Beaurin almost dropped to the ground at the sight of her lodger's new apparel. But, true to her habit of caution, Fleurette said nothing of her new stroke of fortune. Hurrying through her supper, which was exactly like the last, she retired to her quarters under the pretext of wanting sleep.

But she did not sleep. She passed in review all the events of the day, and took an exact account of her gains.

She could neither read nor write; but she could reckon in her head, and it stood her in good part, for in the place which served her both for chamber and office there was neither pen, ink, paper, nor light.

No difference—all the same she made out her account of receipts and expenses as follows.

	Francs.	Centimes.
Remaining of her godmother's bounty. . . .	10	
Received of the lover in the *rue de La Rochfoucauld.*	3	50
From the speculator before going on 'change.	1	
From M. Rymband, the florist.	6	
From the young bride.	5	
From the speculator returned from 'change	10	
For eight bouquets, at 10 centimes. . .		80
Total . . .	36.	30

From which, unfortunately, she had been compelled to take the enormous amount of twenty-two francs for shoes, clothes, and bonnet. So Fleurette had left the clear balance of fourteen francs, all her own. In her eyes it was a splendid capital, and never, in all her knowledge, had a business establishment been opened under more favorable auspices.

She decided to invest this money, or part of it, in the purchase of a fresh stock to-morrow. Waking at the break of day, and opening her door, what was her astonishment, on stepping into the garden, to see lying on the ground another bouquet as beautiful as that of yesterday; and several morning in succession the same surprise awaited her.

Fleurette, we have said, was completely ignorant; and, with her, gratitude gave birth to superstition. She was firmly persuaded that every morning the gift fell from heaven, like the dew, through the intercession of her godmother.

The second day, it is true, and those following, were not as profitable as the first. Nothing extraordinary occurred to raise the price of violets; but the three camelias which M. Rymbaud bought of her every morning, though at a reduced price, together with the sale of her bouquets, made her receipts average seven or eight francs a day.

And when it is considered that this income was gained without any outlay it must be admitted that the house of Fleurette & Co. was a model one, such as is seldom found in Paris.

The following morning she had just made her usual harvest and picked up her mysterious bouquet, and was preparing to go out, when she saw Etienne at the entrance.

"Ah! it's you!" she cried out with pleasure.

"I have come to see you," replied the young workman.

"I am going to my business."

And she pointed to the neat willow basket on her arm, which she had bought, and in which she packed her goods.

"In what direction are you going?"

"Wherever there are people."

"May I accompany you?"

"Certainly."

The pair walked side by side as far as *Notre Dame de Lorette.*

"I have come to pay you," said Etienne.

"Already!"

"That is, to make a payment on account. A customer, for whom I was putting in glass all day yesterday, made me a present of twelve sous, which I bring you."

"Very well," replied Fleurette, whose first impulse was to tell him to keep it; but she immediately felt that it was not best to discourage his growing economy by being too indulgent.

"Let us divide it," she said——"six sous to me, and the rest to you. A man should never be without money."

"Thanks, Fleurette."

"But try to bring the same amount again soon."

"The devil! but you are hard with your debtors!"

"It's necessary in business. Where are you going?"

"I have an errand to do, and shall take the opportunity to see my sister Michelette at the shop."

"Where is it?"

"In the *rue Neuve-Coquenard*; it is but a little way."

"I'll go with you. You promised to introduce me to your sister."

"Meanwhile," said Etienne, with a look at Fleurette's basket, "what's to become of your business?"

"I carry it on everywhere," she answered, seeing a well-dressed young man approach, to whom she offered a bouquet.

"How much for this?" he asked, struck with Fleurette's appearance.

"Five sous, to *you*."

"Why to *me?*"

"You have too genteel an air to higgle."

The purchaser, junior-leader at a lyric theatre, had too much conceit to be insensible to the compliment.

"I would buy it willingly," he said, taking out a piece of fifty centimes," but I have no change."

"I have, *monsieur*," returned Fleurette—"that is," she added, taking the piece," unless *monsieur* prefers *two* bouquets."

"Two for me!"

"No, but one for her to whom you will offer it, and who, I'm sure," she added with a little smile of flattery, "will be very well pleased."

The young leader thought of the pretty actress with whom he was to sing a duet at the noon rehearsal.

"Keep it all," he said to Fleurette, walking off snuffing the perfume of the two bouquets.

"You see!" said the young girl, putting the ten sous in her purse.

"Yes, I see," rejoined Etienne, with a look of discontent—"I see that, for your age, you are a bold flatterer."

"All very simple," said Fleurette *naively*; "*it's business.*"

"Ah! well!—*I'm* satisfied; you'll make a fortune yet."

"I hope so," she answered coolly.

Thus conversing they reached the middle of the *rue Neuve Coquenard* and mounted a stairway at the rear of a court.

CHAPTER V.

In a large room, under the direction of a foreman, at a long table were a dozen girls who made artificial flowers for a rich manufacturer, at the rate of thirty sous a day. These flowers were objects of admiration, masterpieces of art and skill, adornments for the hair, and decorations for ball-costumes.

Michelette, whom Etienne came to visit, and to whom he presented his new friend, was somewhat older than her brother. She was only eighteen, but appeared at least twenty. She was, or rather had been, pretty. Her freshness was already gone, and her cheeks had nothing in them resembling the rose which she had just finished and held in her hand.

Unremitting labor, scanty food, and want of exercise and fresh air, had emaciated her fragile form; but handsome eyes, beautiful teeth, and a graceful figure made Michelette still an attractive girl.

She received the little flower-girl in a manner so engaging that Fleurette conceived at once a strong liking for her; and then, so great was Fleurette's love of flowers, that all these unknown varieties about her, which seemed to bud and bloom under the deft fingers of the operatives, excited both her curiosity and her wonder.

She wanted to question Michelette about everything she saw; but the foreman approached, saying, in an imperious tone:

"You have talked enough, mademoiselle!—that is not what you are paid for. You, monsieur Etienne, are admitted on account of your relationship; but you know that strangers are not allowed here in work-hours."

"True," said Michelette to her new friend; "but come when you please for an hour at noon, which is our luncheon time. Can you do so.

"I can always do it," replied Fleurette, with a glance at the foreman. "I am free, myself, and subject to the commands of no one.

This answer ,which received the general approbation, did not meet that of mademoiselle Charlotte.

Mademoiselle Charlotte was a pretty blonde, with blue eyes, turned up nose, and a generally wide-awake look. She was the most skillful worker, and had the worst tongue in the shop. Whoever fixed the attention, or attracted the looks of others, was sure to incur her displeasure. The flower-girl of the streets seemed to her out of place among those who made flowers indoors; and she had already vented two or three sneers in an undertone on the young girl, her manners, and especially her dress, of all which Fleurette did not lose a word.

She hastened to take leave of Michelette and quit the shop happy to find herself once more in the open air, and to breathe as much of it as could be had in the *rue Nueve Coquenard.*

She did a good day's business, and returned to madame Beaurin's in the evening thinking of Michelette. For her, Michelette and Etienne seemed to constitute almost a family.

It never occured to her to confouud her god-mother with these. *She* was of a nature too superior to allow the least connection, in Fleurette's mind, between the adoration which she felt for her, and the friendship she entertained for the others.

She was still more inclined to believe in her god-mother's divine protection on receiving, next morning a fresh proof of it.

She went out, carrying her usual harvest of flowers, which she had only to stoop in order to gather. At the corner of the *rue de Navarin* and the *rue des Martyrs* she was saluted by a handsome young man, M. William, an errand-porter living in the same street with herself.

Every morning William saw the young flower-girl going out with her basket on her arm, and made her a bow, a civility which she always graciously returned. Fleurette, as we have already said, had a certain tendency to coquetry.

William bore no resemblance to Etienne. He might almost be called a *settled* man. He had established a business in that quarter. There was not an errand to do, a bundle to be carried, or a load of wood to saw, that William

was not called upon, who, with his twenty-five years, brawny shoulders, and vigorous arms, could do, in a few minutes, what would have required of another a whole morning.

Though it was still early he was already shaven, and had on fresh linen.

"Oh! Oh!" cried Fleurette, "how fine you are, monsieur William!"

"Yes—in full dress."

"Are you going to a wedding?"

"No. The char-woman opposite, who lost her husband last month, has just had a sixth boy born, and has asked me to be his godfather. I have consented, for the reason that I shall some day take charge of my god-son, and that will leave the mother one less to support."

William spoke the words so simply and good-naturedly that Fleurette was sensibly moved. Had she followed her first impulse she would have embraced him, but she did not dare. She was eager to express her approbation, but could not find the words. She stopped before him searching in her basket.

"A god-father will need a bouquet," she said, "I beg you to accept this one, monsieur William, and here is one for the mother."

So saying she presented him her two finest bouquets of violets.

"Thanks, my good little girl!" cried William, throwing his arms about her neck, and planting a great kiss on each cheek. "I shall carry your present to Madame Jacques. As for mine, I promise you never to part with it; and shall begin by putting it in my button-hole. It will give me quite the air of a bridegroom. Well, my child, let me not detain you. Time is the wealth of people who work, and is not to be wasted.

Fluerette waved him an adieu and went down the *rue des Martyrs*, repeating to herself the names of William and Madame Jacques. She had extended the circle of her society by the addition of two good and substantial friends.

She first visited M. Rymbaud, the florist. He had taken her into his friendship. He was charmed with her intelligence and industry; and, convinced that a pretty face like hers would, in a year or two, materially contribute to the

attractions of his shop, he still preserved the idea of securing her as an assistant. But she held out against all his inducements. Thanks to her godmother, and the sum paid every morning by M. Rymbaud for her camelias, she was independent.

That day as usual, he paid her a good price; and Fleurette, after making the round of the boulevards, and visiting the doors of the most frequented *cafés* having profitably disposed of half her violets reserved the rest for evening, and turned in the direction of the *rue Neuve-Coquenard.* It was now the girls lunch hour and time for recreation.

The scene was greatly changed. The strict order enforced in working hours had given place to noise, chatter, and unrestrained jollity. The work-girls gave themselves up to the liveliest merriment, and mademoiselle Charlotte, insisting that honest girls were never prudish, had no fear of a word a little broad, or an expression a little free. There were none but women present; and the constant glee and laughter was enough to make wisdom herself giddy.

Some of the girls, in anticipation of the amusements of Sunday, rehearsed among themselves certain polkas, and whirled around the work-table with an animation that threatened to become contagious, when Charlotte frightened them by crying:

"Silence! — the foreman's coming!

Fleurette, who had retired to a corner to talk privately with Michelette, was soon obliged to give up a convesation in which it was impossible to hear a word.

These customs and scenes, altogether new, astonished, but did not displease her. It was a sort of gayety, which, perhaps would have lost nothing by being a little more restrained; but it was a gayety which she found, nevertheless, attractive and seductive. An instinct of modesty told her that while the mirthfulness was that which is natural to young girls, it might have been expressed more decorously; but in spite of all, she was so fascinated by the novelty of the scene, and especially with the desire of learning, that she looked and listened, allowing no detail to escape her.

She felt annoyed, it is true; but to conceal her embar-

rassment, and that she might not appear awkward, she affected an assurance and hardihood she was far from feeling.

"Take care," cried Michelette to Charlotte, waltzing at the moment in rather extravagant style—"take care, you are exposing too much of your ancle."

"So much the better," answered the other gayly, "if it is pretty, and I flatter myself it is."

And looking toward Fleurette, she added:

"The little one's a prude—she droops her eye."

"It's false!" cried Fleurette, vexed at the bursts of laughter that followed—"it's false!"

And she cast a defiant look at Charlotte.

"She blushes, girls," retorted the latter—"see how she blushes."

"It's false!" repeated the poor girl, with energy, her cheeks fairly purple.

"Well, keep your temper, you little ninny; you are excusable," said Charlotte, "You see, girls," she added with an air of feigned indulgence which stung Fleurette to the quick, "the little one knows nothing yet of the world or society."

"And for that reason," said Michelette, "I invite her, with your permission, ladies, to join our Sunday party for a donky-ride at Mountmorency to-morrow,"

"Agreed! agreed!" they answered; "it will be good training for her."

"Permit me, ladies," interrupted Charlotte; "you have not informed her that it is a picnic, and that each is expected to pay her way—two francs a head; and it's possible," she added with a lofty air, "and even probable, meaning no offence, that her means do not permit—"

"I shall pay! I shall pay!" broke in Fleurette, with aroused pride! "I have the means."

"I congratulate you, little one," returned Charlotte; "one would hardly have supposed it. But I ought to tell you that on Sunday suitable clothes are indispensable; and it is our custom on that day," she continued, scanning the flower-girl from head to foot, "to spruce up more or less.

"I shall do so, mademoiselle," replied the latter, whose self-esteem was piqued; "I shall endeavor to do you no discredit."

"Don't mind her," said Michelette, "yourpresence will

give us pleasure. To-morrow, before eight come as you will, you will be well received. I shall notify Etienne."

"There will be gentlemen, then?" said Fleurette artlessly.

"What a question!" exclaimed Charlotte, with a laugh, and an ostentatious courtsey to Fleurette, repeating:

"There will be gentlemen."

At this moment the foreman entered. The hour was up. Each took her place at the work-table, and Fleurette took leave of her new friends, occupied with thoughts hitherto unknown, and a prey to vexation, pride, and violent anger; sentiments to which her heart had before been a stranger.

Before the end of the day she had bought a handsome gown of bright blue merino, which became her exceedingly; a pair of half boots to match, which so neatly fitted her small feet that they looked still smaller; and a rose-colored hat, which barely covered her head, without concealing her white forehead and beautiful dark hair.

All these articles she carried home neatly done up in a white napkin, and carefully laid them away in her chamber. She had no sleep that night. She could only think of the pleasure it would give her to-morrow to look beautiful and humble mademoiselle Charlotte.

CHAPTER VI.

As soon as it was day Fleurette began her toilet.

Her *boudoir* was but dimly lighted; and, as usual, in order to see, she was obliged to open the door, which occasioned no other inconvenience than that of cold; for at that hour no one was stirring, and the garden was completely deserted.

In arranging her hair she was assisted by a fragment of looking-glass which she had discovered among the old lumber stored away by madame Beaurin.

The clock of *Notre Dame de Lorette* struck half-past

seven. It was time to go, for Michelette had said: "In the morning, before eight." On entering the garden she saw her godmother's bouquet at her feet. Her beneficence, it seemed, did not rest, even on Sunday.

What was to be done with this bouquet, seeing that she was going on a party of pleasure? She could not carry on her usual traffic; and yet Sunday was her best day—the day on which most people were out; she had not thought of that before.

She might have run to M. Rymbaud's, and disposed of her camelias, at least; but it was now too late. She had barely time to reach the *rue Neuve-Coquenard*. On the other hand, if she left the flowers at home she would find them faded and withered on her return.

There was a use to put them to which all at once occurred to her, suggested alike by coquetry and self esteem. How could she resist the temptation? She took from the boquet the three white camelias, which harmonized charmingly with the shade of her bright blue gown, and put them in her belt.

The first effect of this elegant and splendid toilet was produced on madame Beaurin, who happened, at the moment, to be at the carriage-entrance. She was fairly stupefied, and would have fallen thunderstruck but for the support of the broom handle she held in her hand.

Respect was pictured in every feature as she hastened to respond, with a profound courtesy, to the patronizing "good morning" of the young girl.

At the street corner, some steps further on, she met William, the errand porter, who said:

"Madame Jacques sends you her thanks."

Then, stopping in the middle of his speech, he looked at her astonished.

"Do you find me beautiful?" asked Fleurette.

William answered with a strange smile—a sad smile, which seemed to say: "Too beautiful." And as she was passing on, he could not help asking:

"Where are you going?"

"To Montmorency, with some young girls, friends of mine."

"Ah!" he replied, with a shake of his head, "at your

age young girls, especially in this quarter, are often as dangerous as young men."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! nothing, nothing," he answered—"a pleasant trip, mam'zelle, and much enjoyment!"

Fleurette hurried rapidly away, and a few minutes after was in the midst of her companions.

Great as was the effect she had hoped to produce, it far exceeded her expectations. Michelette on beholding her, uttered an exclamation of gratified surprise. Her brother Etienne, who was present, flushed with pleasure, and Charlotte turned pale with vexation. The other girls flocked about her minutely examining her dress, some with curiosity, others with envy.

Two or three young workmen, in Sunday dress, who were introduced as cousins of the young ladies, were so loud in their encomiums on her toilet, her youth and her beauty, that several of the ladies were visibly displeased. The three white camelias especially excited remark.

"They are number one!" said a girl in a calash.

"The great ladies whom we supply do not wear as fine ones," remarked another.

"And you bought them?" asked Michelette.

"No, indeed, they are too dear."

"How comes it then that you are so finely decked out so early in the morning?"

"That's easily guessed," said Charlotte; "some mindful lover gives timely attention to the requirements of our young acquaintance."

"Why not?" replied Fleurette, whose pride made her prefer rather to be suspected than defend herself by declaring the truth.

"To whom, then," cried Etienne, in a fit of vexation, "has mam'zelle given hopes?"

"Do I owe *you* an account of my conduct?" answered Fleurette defiantly, comprehending his manner rather than his words.

They reached the Northern railway on foot, and the party from the *rue Coquenard* entered a third-class compartment of an omnibus train, which, in a few minutes, set them down at Montmorency.

Who knows whether during the ride they refrained from pleasantries and witticisms more or less light?

The young girls laughed, and Fleurette laughed with them—not that she had the least idea why, but she wished to have the air of knowing. What really amused her was Etienne's countenance when she listened, with a knowing smile, to certain recitals which, to her, were veritable riddles.

Etienne's anger made her laugh heartily, and as an offset, the other girls, while sharing her gaiety, affected to be shocked at it, beginning with Charlotte, who found the young flower-girl very forward for her age.

During the breakfast, and the events and catastrophes of the donkey-riding, the mirth was redoubled. The cavaliers, especially, M. Pierre, a young cabinet-maker, took much more notice of the other girls than of Fleurette, who amused them for a time, but from whom they soon turned away as from the child that she was. Etienne, alone, did not leave her, keeping constantly beside her and her donkey, whose bridle he insisted on holding.

Far from being gratified by this devotion, our little ingrate felt humiliated by it, and urged forward her steed, which would have gladly remained behind; but Fleurette used every effort to keep up with the other girls and their companions.

The conversation took so free a turn, that, in spite of her inexperience, Fleurette could hardly fail to comprehend it. It thus came about that before evening she had really acquired the knowledge which she had pretended to have in the morning. But the galloping of the long-eared coursers, the shouts and bursts of laughter, kept her from reflection.

Charlotte, who did not forgive her refusal to be either intimidated or disconcerted, at every moment redoubled her attacks. Her principal gift was a talent for raillery, and her chief attraction, as she boasted herself, a pretty ankle.

But Fleurette, by her pungent answers and the freedom of her performances on her donkey, proved several times in the course of the day that she had not only more wit than Charlotte but quite as pretty an ankle; so that, on the whole, by general accord, the victory remained with Fleu-

rette. But in return she had made a bitter enemy of her new associate.

They returned to Paris by the night train. The shouts of laughter were kept up the whole way—on the part of the others with a boisterous gaiety, on Fleurette's part with a mingling of sadness. She had been much less amused and much better instructed than she had supposed. Had she been the gainer? That was a question she was hardly yet prepared to answer.

The train arrived too late for the young ladies to think of trusting themselves on the streets alone, so they were escorted home by their cavaliers. Etienne offered Fleurette his arm, which she would gladly have dispensed with, but which she accepted in order to be like the others.

Etienne was delighted with his day. His sister had paid for him; but he was chiefly captivated with Fleurette, on whom every one had complimented him, and who promised, in a year or two, to be the prettiest and most enchanting *grisette* of the *Navarin* quarter.

The pair walked along without speaking. At last Etienne felt called upon to break the silence.

"Do you know Fleurette, that you were very pretty to-day?"

"I know it," she answered indifferently.

"And well dressed?"

"It is true."

There was another silence, after which he resumed, with embarrassment.

"Do you know that I have a great liking for you?"

"You do well."

"And have you the same for me?"

"There is no reason for that yet. It may come about, if you conduct yourself well, are industrious, and pay me what you owe."

"Oh! certainly," replied Etienne, a little disconcerted—adding, with an effort to recover himself, "only tell me, Fleurette, when I may expect your love?"

She did not understand him. Just then she reached home. She knocked at the door, and entering, closed it on Etienne, who stood motionless in the street as if still awaiting an answer.

Madame Beaurin let her in without grumbling, though it was late; for madame Beaurin never allowed herself to make observations when she believed a lodger fairly in the way by which young girls in that quarter not unfrequently reached the state of great ladies.

Fleurette, who had slept little the night before, slept still less on this. She was dissatisfied with herself and all the world; with herself, for being in the wrong, and with William, who had been in the right and told her the truth. What she had seen and heard, what she had learned in the society of the young work-girls, almost made her regret the ignorance she had lost. She had been happy with it. Her new knowledge brought her shame. Besides, she had squandered the gains of several days, and the bounty of her godmother, in a profitless pleasure party, and gaudy and useless clothes. Finally, she had lost a work-day. What a multitude of faults to reproach herself with!

She must hasten to repair them.

CHAPTER VII.

Fleurette rose early, and hurried into the garden.

But, to her great surprise, she saw no bouquet. She searched carefully, but found nothing. Her godmother had abandoned her.

Persuaded that her godmother was displeased with her, Fleurette drooped her head and wept like a child. The knowledge acquired yesterday had not destroyed her faith. She still believed in her good angel—in her godmother.

"She had good cause," she said, wiping away her tears; "I was unworthy of her protection. It is for her to punish, for me to submit and merit pardon."

Fleurette had one strong quality, that of deciding on her course on the spot, and of promptly and persistently carrying out her resolution. She counted her money, and found that she had hardly fifteen francs remaining.

She had not so much—at least not more—when she began. But she must no longer expect the extraordinary gains hitherto obtained, nor the treasures which had fallen every day as if from heaven. She must confine her hopes to the usual moderate profits. She must make up, by economy, for the smallness of her receipts.

She made a long journey beyond the barrier to buy a basket of violets from a gardener in the suburbs and these she made into bouquets. Her task was more painful and less profitable than it had been recently. Never mind! she must redouble her zeal, activity, intelligence, and skill.

She was afoot from six in the morning till eleven at night; and toward midnight, after the closing of the theatres, when she turned into the *rue Navarin*, she had received three francs and twelve sous.

On her way to her lodgings, crushed with fatigue but far happier than yesterday, she passed the house of madame Jacques, the char-woman. The windows had no shutters, and through the panes, one of which was broken, could be seen the poor widow nursing her babe before a fireless hearth; for she used no coals to warm herself—they were for her customers, and were her sole means of procuring bread for her five other children.

Fleurette looked at her in silence, and thinking of the good day's work she had done; "Ah!" she cried, "the twelve sous will be enough for me; the three francs shall go to her."

She threw the money through the broken pane, and took to her heels, never stopping till she reached her own door, which she closed after her. And then she entered the porter's lodge to get her supper.

"Goodness! how pretty you look!" exclaimed madame Beaurin.

"It's because I'm happy, mother Beaurin. Let us have supper."

As usual the portress tried to get Fleurette to talk, but she was more reserved than ever; and madame Beaurin's curiosity, as usual, went ungratified.

Fleurette never passed a more tranquil night. She got up late, and though still a little tired resolved to begin another busy day. But on entering the garden a new sur-

prise awaited her. She saw at her feet a superb bouquet, fresher and more elegant than any she had yet found!

"Ah!" she exclaimed, falling on her knees, "my godmother has forgiven me."

Reconciled with herself, Fleurette hastened to make up her bouquets, and ran to M. Rymbaud, whom she had not seen yesterday, nor the day before, and who felt uneasy at her absence—

But when she presented her three handsome camelias, one white, another purple, and the third orange, she noticed on the countenance of the honest merchant an expression of surprise.

"What is the matter?" she asked; "do not my flowers suit you?"

"Perfectly!"

"Are they not beautiful?"

"Magnificent; they are from my own shop, I sold them yesterday."

"Indeed!" she cried, astonished.

"This camelia, which I recognize—the one with the yellow border—is very costly, in proof of which," he added, opening his drawer, "there are ten francs for you. But tell me where you got these flowers."

Fleurette related frankly and artlessly how she received the flowers, not withholding her firm conviction that they came from her godmother.

The old flower-merchant listened silently and without interruption; and when she had finished, without combating or contradicting her ideas, he said:

"Very well, my child; probably other similar ones will come. Bring them here every morning, and I'll give you ten francs."

Fleurette went away enchanted.

Next morning, as M. Rymbaud had predicted, she found another bouquet at her feet.

It might almost have been taken for the same, but that it was not quite so fresh, though the violets which surrounded it appeared as though they might have been just gathered.

She untied and divided it as before, first laying aside the part intended for M. Rymbaud, and then making the violets into small bouquets to be sold separately. But all at once

something dropped from the midst of the flowers which she had not seen before. It was a small note, neatly folded, and diffusing a perfume rivalling that of the bouquet.

The note was unsealed. She opened it. It contained lines and characters which were as Hebrew to her, for Fleurette had never learned to read, had never been at school; indeed it would have been difficult to tell at what period of her life she would have found it possible to go there.

How was she to find out the contents of the note? To do so, she must make a confidant of some one. Madame Beaurin was hardly able to spell out the names of her lodgers on their journals and letters, and, besides, to confide in her was equivalent to taking into her confidence the whole quarter. Madame Beaurin was as much out of the question as Etienne, who was not sufficiently discreet to be trusted with such a secret.

There was William, but somehow Fleurette dreaded his strictness. All at once the idea of M. Rymbaud presented itself, and that decided her.

M. Rymbaud was a well-balanced man, observing much and speaking little—a course which he had found greatly to his advantage. He looked upon his occupation as resembling that of a notary—that is, as one of confidence and discretion. If love affairs played an important part in society, bouquets played a part equally important in love affairs.

In many a delicate conjuncture, where the slightest indiscretion would have ruined all, his silence had saved everything—the tranquility of the husband, the honor of the wife, and the safety of the lover, or *lovers;* for on particular occasion it was not unusual for several bouquets to be ordered by different gallants for the same person.

And, if the multiplicity of these offerings led to disputes among lovers or in households or to a demand for explanations not easily given, M. Rymbaud took the whole upon himself.

The ladies might appeal to his testimony without fear. He never contradicted their assertions. He was always ready to take blame on himself, and explain everything on the ground of some mistake or blunder of his own.

He was constantly obliged to listen to such comments as: "Poor Rymbaud! he is so stupid;" but those who made

them always came back to him, and the result was the establishment of an extensive patronage among the richest and most fastidious of the fashionable ladies of Paris.

It was to him that Fleurette went to confide her secret. He already knew part of it, and there was no better course than to trust the whole to his discretion.

He took the note which she handed to him, and read as follows:

"CHARMING DELIA: I know that you are in the power "of one who is as jealous as he is old and ugly. For myself, "I can assure you of one thing—I am young, and, they tell "me not bad looking. He, they say, is rich: so am I. In "a word I have bet a thousand napoleons that I shall get "you away from him. Help me win them, and they are "yours. Let that be the first pledge of love of your ardent "admirer,

"LUDOVIC DURUSSEL."

Fleurette, whose ideas had been considerably extended by her trip to Montmorency and the conversation of the young ladies, pretty well understood the drift; but could form no conception of how her godmother was concerned. So she questioned M. Rymbaud on the point.

"My dear child," he answered, "the most painful thing to me is to destroy your illusion. Your godmother is, no doubt, a beautiful, noble, and virtuous young lady, who has nothing to do with this affair. Her name?"

"I do not know it."

"So much the better. It should not be spoken along with that of mademoiselle Delia, who is one of our most celebrated '*lionesses*' Do you know what a 'lioness' is?"

"Mademoiselle Charlotte has informed me."

"She is one of those who use the most flowers of this kind," pointing to those which Fleurette held in her hand. "Do you know what is meant by a *dame aux camelias*?"

"Mademoiselle Charlotte has told me."

"Well, mademoiselle Delia has been living for a fortnight at No. 29, *rue de Navarin*, first floor."

"It is my own number."

"I was not aware of that. Mademoiselle Delia receives

an old Mexican nobleman, immensely rich, who is her protector—do you comprehend?"

Fleurette interrupted quickly.

"Madameoiselle Charlotte has explained it to me."

"A young man of fashion, M. Ludovic Durussel, only son of a rich jeweler, wishes to entice mademoiselle Delia away from the old Mexican, and so, every evening, comes and buys a fine bouquet which he sends by her *femme de chambre*, whom he pays liberally to convey it her mistress. But the *femme de chambre*, being devoted to the interests of the Mexican, who pays her still better, instead of delivering the bouquets to her mistress throws them out of the window."

"Ah!" cried Fleurette, abashed, "what is to come of it all?"

"Whatever will," answered M. Rymbaud. "In our business it is necessary to serve everybody and displease none. At any rate the flowers are not to blame. Every day, as long as M. Ludovic shall order it and his attachment last, I shall send a bouquet worth twenty francs, which, two or three hours afterwards, if you bring it here, I shall buy back at half-price. But be careful, Fleurette, not to rely too much on such a chance, nor build hopes on a resource so little likely to be lasting. Count on what is substantial and solid, and, to begin, depend no longer on your godmother or any one else in the world. Depend only on yourself, your industry, and your skill. These are the only means, in these days, of gaining a fortune."

Fleurette went away sick at heart. She could not explain to herself the change in her feelings. She saw herself forced to give up convictions which had kept her good and happy.

She lost, in her godmother, her faith, her belief, her illusion. No longer knowing toward what to raise her heart or her thoughts, having no longer a heaven, she fell to the earth, where, as far as she could discover, there was nothing to encourage her to good. Everything urged her toward evil, or, at least, toward selfishness or indifference.

M. Rymbaud had given her very wise and very practical advice; but it was to her heart that it was necessary to

speak, and not to her reason, which was already only too precocious.

Unaided by principles, she had no guide but impulse, a species of instinct, which often kept her in the right way.

This impulse, carried, it may be, to an extreme, told her that while she might receive as gifts from her godmother these bouquets which seemed to fall from the sky she could not accept them from a stranger.

Besides, the flowers, though abandoned, had a value, small as it was, probably not suspected by those who threw them away, and of which it was not proper that she should take advantage without their knowledge.

Madame Beaurin was astonished to see her return at mid-day; but, having become reconciled to being kept in ignorance of Fleurette's affairs, she made no inquiries. It was the latter who began to question.

"Have you not," she asked, "in your house,"—she knew that this expression would flatter the portress—"a madame Delia, who occupies the first floor?"

I am proud to say so replied madame Beaurin, "my best lodger, a lady whose acquaintance, my dear, I would recommend you to lose no time in forming, I'll present you to her if you like. Though rich, she is not proud, and she and I are like two fingers of the same hand."

Fleurette made no answer to this proposition, but continued:

"Hasn't she a *femme de chambre?*"

"Mademoiselle Justine," cried Madame Beaurin, disdainfully—"an impertinent minx, insolent, good for nothing, who thinks herself too much of a princess to speak to common people, or even to notice them. Yesterday, only think, my child——"

Without waiting for the rest of her story Fleurette made a gesture of thanks, and hurried to her own apartment. She dressed herself in her best, the same clothes she had worn on her trip to Montmorency to eclipse mademoiselle Charlotte, and in this brilliant costume mounted the grand stairway, which she had never ascended before, and gave two knocks at the first-floor door.

It was opened by a servant in livery.

"Madame does not receive. She has not yet risen."

"It is not to her I wish to speak."

"Is it to me, little one?" said the lackey, with a softened air.

"No, Monsieur, but to Mademoiselle Justine, on a matter of importance."

"Oh! that's different," replied the man in livery; "she's at breakfast with one of her friends, I'll let her know."

Fleurette waited in an ante-chamber, admiring the furniture. She thought it the finest apartment she had ever seen. In a few minutes the lackey returned.

"Mademoiselle Justine consents to see you," he said.

Fleurette was conducted to a *boudoir* whose luxury and elegance still more surprised her, and made her tremble for the success of her negotiation.

Mademoiselle Justine, seated at a round table with Palmyre, a young *femme de chambre*, one of her friends, was despatching a slice of buttered bread and a cup of tea.

"Come in, mademoiselle," she said with a patronizing air, "Larose says you wish to speak to me on a matter of importance?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Isn't she a droll little one?" said Palmyre, pouring herself another cup of tea.

"Speak," said Justine; and seeing that she paused added: "you need not hesitate before Palmyre. She is my most intimate friend."

Fleurette was re-assured, and as she had not been asked to sit down, though there were plenty of chairs, she took one. This unintentional piece of assurance produced a good effect on the others, who thought that one who acted with so little ceremony was entitled to be treated with some.

So they listened attentively.

"Mademoiselle," said Fleurette, addressing Justine, "every morning, for a week, you have thrown a bouquet out of the window—a very beautiful bouquet."

"What is that to you?" replied Justine, haughtily; by what right do you come here?

"I come to thank you."

Justine looked at her astonished

"I am a flower-girl, mademoiselle," Fleurette continued, "and these bouquets have a value of which you are ignorant, or which, perhaps, you despise, but by which I have no right to profit without informing either you or your mistress."

"My mistress has nothing to do with it," answered Justine, with an embarrassent which Fleurette did not fail to notice; "they are my perquisites, and I do what I like with bouquets which my mistress has worn, or which she does not want."

"Well, mademoiselle," returned Fleurette, coolly, "this is my offer; I shall come here every morning early and take the bouquets which your mistress has either worn or," laying stress on the words, "*does not want*, and pay you a franc apiece for them."

Justine made a gesture of surprise.

"It's not much," said Fleurette, in a conciliating tone, for a fine lady like you, but *it* is a great deal for a poor girl, like me, just commencing business; and then," she added, with a smile, "it's at least thirty francs a month that you didn't expect."

"Very true," observed Palmyre.

"In proof of which here's the price of ten bouquets, for which I already owe you. Short accounts make long friends."

And she laid ten francs on the table.

"What a charming little thing she is!" cried Justine.

"It's so much money gained," said Palmyre; "and I, who don't know what to do with the bouquets my mistress gets every day—those from the Jockey-Club, for instance—would ask no better than to make a similar bargain with mademoiselle—"

"On the same terms?" interposed Fleurette quickly—"agreed!"

"Done!" replied mademoiselle Palmyre, reaching out her hand. "I shall expect you every morning at No. 32, *rue Chaptal;* and I promise you the patrouage of all the principal *femmes de chambre* of the Bréda quarter."

"Yours would be sufficient, mademoiselle," said Fleurette, politely, "but as the offer comes from you I accept it."

Fleurette rose. Her two patronesses saw her to the door, and mademoiselle Justine said to Larose, pointing to Fleurette at the same time, "remember, I am always at home for mademoiselle at whatever hour she chooses to call."

Fleurette, who half an hour before had entered this grand apartment in the most doubtful and precarious position, left it with a *treaty of commerce* concluded which established the most advantageous relations between herself and the *floral world* of Bréda Street — relations which, with skill and industry, could not fail to create an immense business and assure her a position.

There are in Paris many such industries—industries exceedingly simple, and which nobody thinks of, but which enrich those who have the cleverness to adopt them first, and put them in practice on a grand scale.

The first thing Fleurette did was to run to the *rue Saint Lazare*, at the corner of the *rue du Rocher*, where she had left her godmother's goldpiece. It was returned to her, carefully wrapped in a piece of paper. As soon as she reached the street she looked at it with reverence and raised it to her lips.

"Sole memento of my godmother!" she murmured," you shall never leave me again!"

On the next day, and those following Fleurette made her harvest early, and went laden with *sheaves* of flowers to the shop of M. Rymbaud, whom she partly associated in her speculation.

Most of the bouquets were of the evening before, and some of them had either figured at a ball or in the front of a stage-box at the theatre, and, like those who had carried them, were not always in their first bloom and freshness. The price ranged accordingly, and they went on the morrow either to shine at weddings beyond the barrier, or at second-class *fêtes*, or to be mingled in the huge baskets which decorate the stair case of a minister, or of a hotel on the occasion of a *soirée*.

At other times, thanks to the management of a *femme de chambre*, of two or three bouquets sent to the same person, only one would be accepted, and the other carefully preserved and delivered to Fleurette, came back at half price to the green-house which they had just left.

In a few days Fleurette's speculation produced results which were sure to increase with time, but which already returned such profits that, for the present, she gave up selling at retail. She no longer offered bouquets on the promenades in the morning, or at the theatre doors in the evening.

Another change: Fleurette felt that with her increase of business it was no longer proper to remain in the hovel in which she had hitherto passed her nights. A dealer in flowers of her position ought to be more suitable lodged.

There was to let on the fifth floor, next the roof, a small chamber, light and airy, with a fire-place and a south window.

A deep closet in the angle formed by the slant of the roof gave the room a regular shape. It was there Fleurette intended keeping her wood and her cooking utensils when she got them. There was a second closet in the recess to the right of the fire-place, which would serve for her clothes.

So many advantages cost dearly. The rent, like the chamber itself, was very *high*, being a hundred and sixty francs a year; but, as we have seen, Fleurette knew how to calculate, and she saw that the ten sous a day which she paid Madame Beaurin would amount, in a year, to a hundred and eighty-two francs and fifty centimes, and she no longer hesitated.

On the morning of the 8th of April she presented herself to the portress with her basket on her arm and asked to have opened the chamber on the fifth floor.

"Ah! a very pretty apartment!—it is to let."

"It is no longer so."

"How do you know that!"

"I have seen monsieur, the proprietor."

"You dared to go and see him without informing me?"

"Yes, mother Beaurin, and I asked a reduction, which he granted. I get it for one hundred and fifty francs."

"A reduction of ten francs!—a thing he has never done for any one before!"

"I come to give you your gratuity and take my key."

Madam Beaurin, dumb with astonishment, took the silver piece handed her by the girl, and immediately offered, with a great show of zeal, to assist her in moving,

"Thanks, mother Beaurin, it's already done."

"And your moveables?"

"They are here," said Fleurette, pointing to her basket. "I shall need no help to carry them up."

Having most of her wearing apparel on her back, and her money in her pocket, she was not long installing herself in her new abode.

"Within an hour she had found, in the *rue des Martyrs* and *faubourg Montmartre*, a complete and comfortable set of furniture: an iron bedstead, with a matrass; a table, not for writing but for making he rbouquets, which had a drawer, with a locke, in which to keep her money; a stove; a saucepan; a glass and two plates. Add a water-pitcher and a basin and you have an idea of the flower-girl's furniture.

Her friend William, whom she had charged with these purchases, selected and bought the whole, and then carried them on his back to the fifth floor.

Fleurette had never found herself so well situated before: air, space, sunlight, comfort, even luxury; and, amid all her joys, one which exceeded all the rest—*she was at home!* But a single wish remained.

"Ah!" she cried, as she lay down to sleep, "if my godmother, could but see me."

CHAPTER VIII

Two years and more had passed. The child had become a young woman, not beautiful but pretty. Her manner, though not striking, was original and *piquante*, and equally free from boldness and timidity—that of one who neither sought nor shunned admiration. At sight, one would have taken her for a coquette; judged by her speech, she would have been reckoned prudent, modest, and impassive. During these two years she had retained the same friends, preserved with them the same relations, and frequented the same society. Her associates were Michelette and the shop-

girls, also Justine and Palmyre and their friends—*lorettes* of the *second* class, somewhat inferior, if that be possible, in tone and manners to *lorettes* of the *first*.

The little flower-girl had grown up at hazard, without guidance, exposed to the influences of the society we have described, its language, morals, and principles, without troubling herself to inquire whether they were right or wrong.

"There was one thing to excite wonder and admiration—that in such soil the abandoned and neglected flower remained still fresh and untarnished.

William the errand-porter, had early conceived a liking for Fleurette, warmer perhaps, than he was himself aware of. One circumstance drew them together, and established between them a bond of union; remote, it is true, but almost a tie of kindred between those who had no other. William was a Swiss, as Fleurette believed herself to be. William was born at Schaffhausen; but Fleurette did not know which was her native canton. No difference—the discovery that they were of the same country had given rise to an intimacy and affection between them on Fleurette's part altogether filial, and day by day assuming a more tender character on the side of the young man.

It was this, perhaps, without avowing it to himself, that made it so difficult for him to give Fleurette the prudent and sober counsel he often wished to offer her. She would look at him—the preceptor would become confused and stammer, and had neither strength nor courage to make the least remonstrance.

Like all Swiss, absent from their native mountains, he longed for home, his chief ambition being to gain enough to enable him to return thither; but he strove in vain to awaken in Fleurette the love and memory of her native hamlet.

"How is it," he asked one day, as they sat together in the shop of madame Jacques, the char-woman, "that you can recall neither the locality nor the name of your village?"

"I can remember nothing but the white mountains."

"They are very beautiful!"

"And very cold!"

"You can recall nothing else!"

"Yes, clusters of bright red flowers in the midst of the snow."

"I know them!" cried William.

"Red flowers, shaped like a star."

"The same!—and the leaves always green."

"Yes, I can see them yet."

"Then your father's cottage must have been situated very high, for the '*Star of the Alps*' only grows in elevated places."

"Ah! what beautiful flowers!—how different from camelias—they never fade, and their like is never seen in France."

"I can well believe it—they only grow amid snow and icicles, and it is much easier to build warm hot houses than mountains of ice."

"Ah!" cried Fleurette, with the ardent feeling of a young girl, "how delighted I should be to have some of them!"

William put his hand on her mouth as if to say: "Stop!—I cannot go to seek them for you!" thus reproducing unconsciously, and by a simple gesture, the delicate and tender speech of Lord Albemarle to his mistress, as she gazed admiringly at a star; "*Do not look for I can not give it to you.*"

"Ah!" replied Fleurette, "I know well, good William, that you need no urging when it is a question of obliging me; so I have a favor to ask."

The honest fellow made no answer. He moved his chair quickly near that of Fleurette and listened attentively, while Madame le Jacques went to attend to a customer who had just entered.

"William," she asked in a low tone, "have you made any savings?"

"Yes," he answered with a look of contentment and honest pride, "I have made some."

"How much?"

"Two hundred francs."

"Quite a handsome amount."

"And you, Fleurette?"

"I have a great deal—indeed too much!"

"How much then?"

She lowered her voice, and whispered in his ear:

"Not far from eight hundred francs."

"God be thanked!" exclaimed William, raising his hand to his hat, "for I am witness that it is money honestly earned! But why do you call it too much?"

"Because I am at a loss where to put it."

"That's an embarrassment *I* have never felt yet," said William, laughing.

"The little drawer of my table has not a very good lock, so that in my absence I have fears for my treasure, and in order to feel easy I have concluded to trust it to you."

"To me!" cried William, astonished.

"To you, without anyone knowing it."

William paused a moment before answering. He was greatly touched by this mark of friendship and esteem.

"Ah!" he answered, with emotion, "you are a good girl, for you have faith in others. But unhappily your savings would be no safer with me than in your drawer. But I know a chest with a strong lock in which your treasure will run no risk."

"What is that?"

"The savings-bank. It is there I keep my own money; why not put yours there?"

"How is is it done?"

"I'll show you whenever you wish."

"Let us say to-morrow then."

She left William in conference with madame Jacques about some sacks of charcoal that she had to deliver to a customer, and which the good-natured porter undertook to carry for nothing.

"Adieu, then my good William," said Fleurette, in an affectionate tone, "till tomorrow."

As she uttered the words she saw Etienne standing in the street near the door of the shop, with a pale face, and looking at her earnestly.

"Ah! it's you Etienne!—you startled me—where are you going?"

"I was going to see you."

"Well, you will have no need now to inquire of madame Beaurin, my portress, to find that I am not at home."

"So I see," replied Etienne dryly; "I was waiting till you should be visible."

And seeing that she made several steps as if to go, he added:

"In what direction are you going?"

"In the direction of my business—and you?"

"Wherever you go."

"Provided I give permission."

"But you will give it, Fleurette, for I have lost my head today, and may do something unfortunate."

"You have, indeed, a vicious look," she said; adding, with a laugh: "But bad characters are often treated with more indulgence than good ones. Don't presume too much on that, though, unless—"

"Unless what?—what is it you propose to do?" he asked, with concentrated rage—"drive me away? So much the better!"

Fleurette made no answer; but with the gesture of a queen, motioned him with her finger to take one of the two streets whose intersection they approached, while she, at a quickened pace, departed by the other.

All Etienne's anger vanished at the fear of never seeing her again. He ran after her with a repentant and submissive look, saying with tears in his eyes:

"I shall never again be angry with you; only hear me, mademoiselle."

"Speak, then," she replied, gently.

He walked for a time at her side in silence, seeking for words to touch the tyrant's heart.

Since the day of their first meeting Fleurette had played an important part in his life.

An indolent and idle workman, she had awakened in him, if not a love, at least, a habit of work. She had assumed and maintained an ascendency over him that he had never been able to resist. He had obeyed her without question when she was yet a child, and now that she was a young woman, he obeyed her in spite of himself.

He had long believed himself her only friend, her sole companion; and, certain of her affection, as everybody assured him, and of having her for his *good friend* whenever he chose, he slept secure of his future triumph, with the indolent confidence which formed the basis of his character. But when Fleurette grew up an attractive and charming

young woman, and especially when others began to notice the fact, Etienne became uneasy.

When Fleurette, indifferent enough to her beauty, without inviting did not repel admiration, Etienne grew jealous; and when, in spite of their long friendship, he saw himself no better treated than others it made him furious.

It cannot be denied, at the same time, that she felt a certain preference for him. People become attached to those on whom they have conferred benefits. She looked upon him somewhat in the light of a child whom she had brought up and instructed; and the control which she exercised over him flattered, if not her heart, at least her self-esteem.

Though feeble and slight in frame, Etienne was of so violent a temper that even his more robust companions stood in some dread of him. But in the midst of his most violent paroxysms a look from Fleurette would calm him.

Born with evil instincts, all the vices learned in the work-shops were congenial to him, and easily became his own. Listening only to his passions, he readily became a debauchee, a gambler, and a drunkard. The influence of Fleurette had rather put to sleep than eradicated his evil inclinations. In a word, he was only good when he could'nt help it.

One Sunday, returning from the barrier with some young companions, in a fit of drunken rage he raised his hand against Fleurette, who had sharply reproved him. From that time, already a year ago, he had sworn never again to touch drink; and, in spite of the solicitations of his comrades, he had kept his word.

It was a thing so unusual among persons of his class that on hearing of it Fleurette was much gratified; and one day, seeing him refuse wine for water, she could not help saying:

"It is well; that glass of water shall be no loss to you."

Another day, going to visit his sister, he met a young wood-carver of powerful build, a sort of Hercules, in fact. M. Leopold was very devoted to mademoiselle Charlotte; with whom, it is likely, he thought to ingratiate himself by making jesting remarks about Fleurette. Etienne was not particularly brave, but, when enraged, he was reckless. He sprang, like a tiger, on M. Leopold, who, taken unawares,

had the greatest difficulty in defending himself; and the struggle bade fair to be a bloody one, when Fleurette arrived, and her presence put an end to the conflict. She inquired the cause, which Michelette hastened to explain.

"Ah!" she said coolly, "it was hardly worth the trouble; but all the same, Etienne, these blows shall pass to your credit."

It was something like making him a promise; but in spite of that, in spite of Etienne's love, in spite of the pains and efforts of Michelette, who constantly pleaded her brother's cause, Fleurette would give no answer, and got displeased when too strongly importuned.

She consented, however, as a particular favor to grant her lover an audience as he walked by her side, with bowed head, along the street.

At last he broke silence:

"You are aware, Fleurette, that when I first knew you I was only a working glazier. You thought that employment too humble, for you are proud; so I went through a new apprenticeship to a decorative painter. You wished it, and I did it for your sake."

"True, but it did you no harm."

"For you I quit going to the barrier, and gave up wine."

"Which drank up your money," said Fleurette, laughing, "and injured your health. You are now rich and well. It seems to me that the gain has all been yours."

"To come to the point," cried Etienne, impatiently, for he saw that the sacrifices of which he had been boasting had only resulted in profit to himself—"to come to the point, all the young shop-girls, all those of our acquaintance, have some one—"

"I do not deny it."

"Some one whom they love, and by whom they show themselves to be loved."

"True."

"All except you."

"I acknowledge it."

"You are like the others,—you are free."

"Yes."

"Why, then, do you not choose some one?"

"Precisely because I *am* free."

Etienne was struck by the force of this reasoning.

The reader may be surprised that in all this conversation the word *marriage* was never spoken either by Etienne or Fleurette. It is all very simple. Such ideas were so foreign to the usages of the world in which she lived that they had never reached Fleurette, for the good reason that none of those about her ever had them.

"But—but," stammered Etienne, "you have given me your promise."

"I?—never!"

"At least you have never said no."

"Very true; but I have not said *yes*. Besides I do not know that it is necessary to choose any one."

"But it *is!*" cried Etienne, "unless you wish to make yourself a subject of remark and ridicule."

"Heaven forbid!" she said carelessly.

"Well, then, here am I—I who have loved you so long that people believe everything is arranged between us, already."

"In which they are wrong."

"You wish, then, to choose another!" exclaimed Etienne, whose nerves tingled and whose eyes flashed.

"If I did, where would be the harm?"

"Don't say that, Fleurette!" he replied, in a fury.

"Where would be the harm?" she repeated, nothing daunted. "Since all the others made their choice, I have the same right to make mine."

"You have some one in your mind, then!" cried Etienne, beside himself, and with clenched fists.

Fleurette looked at him, and answered carelessly:

"No one; but take care—if any one does you an injury it will be yourself."

"I! great God!" he exclaimed, uttering a cry of rage.

"I will not be commanded," she added haughtily; "and now, Etienne, we have said enough. You have your business to attend to and I have mine. Good-bye!"

Etienne knew her disposition. He saw by her manner that it would be imprudent to insist. He went to rejoin Michelette at the shop in the *rue Neuve-Coquenard*, while Fleurette called on her patrons in the Bréda quarter, another land of independence, where, also, marriage is regarded as belonging to the realm of legend and fiction.

CHAPTER IX.

FLEURETTE finished the round by calling on mademoiselle Justine, who, for a fortnight past, had been busier than a minister of state.

There had been such activity in her department, such an interchange of couriers and diplomatic notes, that she had hardly been able to spare a moment to speak to Fleurette, who, being neither curious nor talkative, was a confidant of the rarest and most precious type.

Meanwhile the flower-girl accepted events as they happened, without seeking to inquire into their causes. Never had there been such an abundance of flowers, and never had they been more beautiful and fresh.

Three or four large bundles of camelias came every day, either together or separately; and, as mademoiselle Delia, the idol to whom so many homages were addressed, could wear but a single bouquet at once, the others, on the same day, found their way back to the flower-merchant's shop through the agency of Fleurette, subject, as the exchange brokers say, to her commission and that of the *femme de chambre.*

The constant going and coming caused an unusual bustle in the house, and gave mademoiselle Justine an increase both of occupation and profits; for she had a host of other things to receive beside flowers; and she made it a rule that every evening her accounts should be balanced up to date, and kept in strict order.

"Ah! here you are, little one!" she cried, as Fleurette entered. "Come to my assistance, then; for I don't know what to turn my attention to first." And she pointed to the bouquets, caskets, and rich stuffs with which the *boudoir* was everywhere encumbered.

"In the name of goodness, what has happened?" cried Fleurette.

"A thing, my dear, that ought to have ruined us, but enriches us instead. We are no longer under the dominion of Mexico."

"What!—the Mexican noble, so old and so rich!"—

"Yes, that ingot, that gold mine, has been forced to leave us! A revolution has compelled him to return to his country, and he would have taken us with him; but ah! don't speak to me of revolutions! One never knows what to count on. Happily France shall see no more of them—that is settled—and for that reason we remain in Paris. Still, it is necessary to live and sustain one's rank; and my mistress is accustomed to spend eighty thousand francs a year."

"A habit, I suppose, like any other."

"Certainly; and, which once acquired, is not easily given up. Moreover our relations with the Mexican—"

"Must have injured your mistress."

"On the contrary, it has given her such *éclat* that applicants have poured in from every quarter; but none of these possessed the required standing and *solidity*, and we did not wish to descend. In the first place there was a prince, apparently well enough—"

"A prince!" exclaimed Fleurette, amazed.

"Ah!" replied Justine, with a look of superiority, "you in your simplicity, allow yourself to be dazzled all at once. A prince, indeed, is brilliant, but has his inconveniences—appearances to be preserved, and a wife to be kept in ignorance, for example; and then, under pretence of not compromising himself, he economises. He doesn't dare ruin himself like a private individual. So mademoiselle Delia, who is above all such paltry expedients said: "However it's arranged, I must have eighty thousand francs a year, as in the happy times of the Mexican!"

"Well?"

"Well, she has three adorers, of whom two are exchange-brokers; and ever since this change of administration bouquets, presents and attentions the most delicate have been not only doubled but tripled—in the first place, for madame, in the next, for myself. It is an understanding as cordial as it is admirable—a perfect triumph of love and friendship!"

Fleurette was probably about to ask a number of explanations when the bell sounded; and an elegantly dressed young man appeared, followed by a footman in livery, to whom he threw his great coat double-lined with sable, which the servant carried into the ante-room. The door of the

boudoir was then closed, and the young man said, in a tone of authority:

"Inform madame."

"Ah!" cried Justine, "Monsieur Ludovic Durussel!"

"Inform madame," he repeated.

"Madame returned so late from the ball that she forbade me to enter her apartment before noon," replied Justine, seemingly a little confused at the appearance of the young man. But instantly recovering herself she added: "You know madame expects you to breakfast with her at half-past twelve."

"Yes, and I have come before the hour to give her a surprise; and to replace the bracelet she lost day before yesterday, carry her this with my compliments, and say I am waiting."

Justine, took the casket which he handed her, and went out with visible embarrassment, which, however, M. Ludovic failed to observe.

Fleurette, who remained standing near the mantel-piece, regarded with surprise and attention the young man who threw himself carelessly on a divan of blue satin. It seemed to her as though it were not the first time she had seen him. His features, young and handsome and at the same time effeminate, she said to herself, were of a marked type not altogether unknown to her. At first she searched her memory in vain; but all at once she uttered an exclamation. Her recollection had came back.

The young man turned his head and saw a young girl with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes looking at him as if in a sort of trance.

M. Ludovic was flattered. Her cheeks were fresh, her lips vermilion, her eyes animated, and her form graceful. In the clearness of her complexion, and the bloom of her seventeen years, the young girl had decidedly the advantage of mademoiselle Delia.

Ludovic involuntarily compared her to the bouquets which she held in each hand, while her crossed arms pressed another against her breast. She had the appearance of being enclosed in a frame of flowers, which presented her only in half-length to the eye-glass of her admirer.

Ludovic had too much self-esteem to underrate the

notice he had attracted; and seeing that the girl's eyes remained fixed upon him, he addressed her with a princely air:

"Decidedly, my dear child, you seem to look upon me not unfavorably."

"No, monsieur," stammered Fleurette, recovering herself, but still somewhat confused, "you deceive yourself."

"Deceive myself!" cried Ludovic, mortified at the correction. "You seemed, at any rate, to be looking at me."

"I was only trying to recall where I had seen you before, and just now I remember: it was on the avenue of the *Champs-Elysées*, two and a half years ago."

"You have a good memory. It was then, a circumstance particularly agreeable to you?"

"On the contrary, monsieur, I owe to you the first compliment that ever really wounded my heart."

"You see," said Ludovic, laughing, "that I am already on the track. What were you then?"

"A flower-girl, as I am to-day. But then I was barefooted and in rags."

"I like you better as you are to-day. Your hand especially," he added, taking it in his own, "is delicate and well shaped."

"You found it black then."

"It has changed color, and I have changed my opinion. I particularly admire these rosy nails," he said, attempting to raise them to his lips.

Fleurette hastily withdrew her hand.

"Take care, monsieur," she said; "you might blacken your lips."

"Ah! I see the word piqued you, and you are determined not to pardon it."

"Quite the reverse. I am ready to bestow upon you my gratitude if you care to earn it."

"How, my child?—speak!" cried the young man, forcing Fleurette to a seat beside him on the divan.

She did not wait to be urged.

"Monsieur Ludovic," she began.

"Ah! you know my name?"

"I have just heard it from Justine. Three years ago,"

she continued with emotion, "the day I met you in the *Champs Elysees*, you were with a lady who was, I believe, your mother."

"Very possible."

"And some other ladies."

"Quite likely."

"Who were those ladies?"

"How do you expect me to remember?"

"Then you do not recall them!" she said, turning pale with agitation, "I can yet see that tall lady, in the black dress—that tall lady, so thin and sallow—"

"I know several such."

"And the three young ladies all dressed alike."

"Wait! the light begins to dawn; one was—"

"A blonde," said Fleurette.

"And another—"

"Was red-headed, and the third always laughing."

"The mesdemoiselles de Kéroualle, whom my mother wanted me to marry."

"That is no concern of mine."

"But it is of mine, for the danger is not over yet, though it has diminished."

"How so?"

"The oldest one is married."

"All the same to me. It is my godmother whose name I wish to know."

"Your godmother!"

"Yes, do you not remember? she who named me Fleurette."

"Well, it's a pretty name—almost as pretty as yourself, and that is saying not a little."

"It's not a question of myself, monsieur," said Fleurette, with impatience, "but of her, my protectress—of her who so generously gave a gold-piece to a poor girl, to which she has since owed all her good fortune."

"Oh! yes, I remember; it was a piece of folly of hers; but what are you aiming at?—what is it you wish to ask?"

"Her name, monsieur—the name of this noble young lady, so charming and so lovely!—her name, monsieur," repeated Fleurette, with a supplicating voice — "speak, speak!"

"Clotilde de Kéroualle," said Ludovic, "the cousin of the other young ladies, an orphan without fortune, the Cinderella of the house."

"Where does she live—is she in Paris?"

"No—at the further end of Brittany, where her aunt, the marquise, thinks she can live more cheaply than in the capital; which is true, and with more *ennui* besides. It's a year since I have heard of these ladies, and, unless some family matter brings them back they are likely to live and die, the mother in her old *château*, and the daughters in some convent in the neighborhood."

"Ah! this *château*—if I could only go there, though it were on foot!"

"Why—what do you want of them?"

She made no answer.

"For what good?" she said to herself; "he would not understand me."

"Well, if you only wish to send your compliments as god-daughter why not send them in a letter?"

"Alas! I do not know how to write!" she answered, with distress.

"Wait a moment," said Ludovic, detaining her on the divan from which she was in the act of rising; "now that I have answered all your questions, it's *my* turn."

"You will not have time, monsieur, for see, mademoiselle Justine is coming."

Justine came back entirely self-possessed, saying with a hearty laugh:

"I have kept monsieur waiting, for which I ask his pardon. I waited ten minutes at madame's door, not venturing to enter, as long as I thought I heard her sleeping; but Larose has just told me she has gone out."

"Gone out at this hour!" said Ludovic astonished.

"Yes, monsieur. I thought him joking, at first; but it seems madame's mother has been taken suddenly ill, and madame went in great haste."

"Very well," returned Ludovic, without further troubling himself about his *mother-in-law's* indisposition. I can wait."

Justine looked at him surprised.

"I can wait," he repeated, with a glance at Fleurette.

Then addressing Justine:

"Tell my servants they can go; I shall not need them.'

Justine hurried out, saying to herself:

She must be with Héloise. I'll go there and tell her."

An instant after was heard the rumbling of a carriage, as it drove away; and Ludovic, approaching Fleurette, contemplated her a moment in silence, and with a sort of impertinent admiration.

"Do you know, little one, that you are really very amusing and very pretty? It is I who tell you so."

"For which I thank you. "she replied coolly, "but I knew it already."

"That proves," he continued with a significant look—"that proves that if you were willing—"

He stopped, as if awaiting her answer; but she made none.

"Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly."

"If you were willing, then—" he repeated slowly.

"Yes," said Fleurette, laughing, "but I am *not* willing.'

"You would no longer sell bouquets," continued Ludovic, finishing his sentence.

"Everyone to his taste; I prefer to sell bouquets."

"So we aspire to lofty sentiments!" said Ludovic, ironically.

"I?" replied Fleurette, shrugging her shoulders. "Lofty sentiments are for great ladies, but we—"

"Then for what are you waiting to decide you?"

"My will, my idea, my affection."

"Good!" cried Ludovic with earnestness—"and this idea—this affection—what is needed to inspire it?"

"One thing only."

"What?"

"*To please me!*"

Far from being disconcerted by this answer Ludovic interpreted it in the sense most flattering to his self-esteem. He only saw in it an indirect confession.

"I understand," he said, complacently stroking his moustache; "you prefer not to consent on the spot, but to be importuned. Very well—importuned you shall be."

Fleurette made no reply.

"I beseech you, then, with importunity, with urgency, to tell me what day I may expect you to love me!"

Fleurette, without showing the least resentment, raised her pretty eyes and said laughingly:

"I shall not say *never*, for it is not well to discourage anyone; but my answer is, *not yet*."

"I see," said the young man, seeking to conceal his disappointment under a smile, "you have decidedly not forgotten our first meeting, and still bear malice."

"So little, monsieur, that before we part I wish to render you a service."

"How very queer you are!—but, go on."

"Well, monsieur, mention to no one what I tell you, but, if you choose, profit by it: *you are imposed upon here*."

"Indeed!"

"I assure you of it. There are two others, besides yourself, from whom bouquets are accepted."

"That does not distress me," he replied coolly.

There is a young unknown, younger and prettier than mademoiselle Delia, who would speedily eclipse her, if one took the trouble to bring her out."

Fleurette pretended not to understand, and turned to go.

At the same instant the door opened and mademoiselle Delia entered in elegant morning costume. She had just returned from an excursion—from a rural breakfast probably—for her cheeks bore the rich color given by country air. She was accompanied, moreover, by a charming young man, *not* one of the *triumvirate*.

"Ah!" cried mademoiselle Delia, seeing Ludovic—"ah! you have been waiting for me, I see!—I beseech your pardon, I have just come from the milliner's, and met Saint-Estève, my music-teacher, by the way, whom I have the pleasure of presenting to you. He gave me his arm home, this being the day for my lesson."

"And that I may not hinder you," said Ludovic, "I shall take my leave. But how is madame, your mother?"

"Strong as the *Pont-Neuf*, my dear; but you have a disturbed look."

"Because of not being able to breakfast with you. I have a business engagement, and have only come to excuse myself."

"How provoking!" replied Delia. "We shall see you this evening, I suppose?"

"Good morning, little one," she said to Fleurette, without waiting for Ludovic's answer; "where is Justine, and why is she not here when I come?"

"She has probably gone to see your mother whom she believed sick," replied Ludovic; "she is so devoted to the family!"

"So she is," replied Delia naively; "but I must go and take my lesson. Are you coming, Saint-Estève?"

And with a wave of her hand to Ludovic:

"Till this evening, my dear!"

Delia ended the scene by this brilliant stroke, and disappeared, followed by her *music-teacher*.

Ludovic, concealing his chagrin as best he could, hastened to the door of the ante-room, but at the moment of putting his hand to the crystal knob, he stopped.

"Fleurette," he cried, with warmth, "say but a word, and to-morrow you take Delia's place; and my carriage, my horses, my love, and a new and splendid establishment are yours!"

She answered with a burst of laughter.

"What's the matter?" he said, astonished.

"Only this, monsieur; that if mademoiselle Delia heard you I should lose the custom of her house."

"Adieu!" cried Ludovic, enraged, and rushing into the ante-room.

"Adieu!" returned Fleurette.

She dropped back on the sofa, and remained for a few minutes buried in reflection—saying, as she raised her head:

"After all, I think it would be easier to love Etienne."

CHAPTER X.

The next day was Sunday; the only day, as William had said, on which the savings bank was kept open for the benefit of the working class, who had thus all the week in which to lay up their savings, and Sunday to deposit them.

William had promised to call for Fleurette at noon. Like all industrious people she was an early riser; but to-day being Sunday, and the day on which she was to secure her little fortune by putting it in a place of safety, it was a special holiday. So it was nearly nine o'clock, and Fleurette was still in bed. It was the first time such a thing had happened.

She thought of her prospects, which seemed in every way encouraging, and of the singular propositions made to her within the last few days, in which she saw nothing to cause alarm.

The offer of Ludovic had not dazzled her, nor had Etienne's despair moved her.

Neither supplicant had caused her heart to beat; but it must be confessed that neither had excited her indignation; and, tested by her moral standard, their proposals were open to but one objection—that of not pleasing her.

But, as we hinted at the end of the last chapter, completely ignorant as she was of love, a secret instinct, not readily deceived, told her that Etienne cherished for her a sincere affection, and that Ludovic did not; that the gross and jealous tenderness of the one had something flattering in it, while the more polished protestations of the other were humiliating. As to William, the idea of his loving her, or that his friendship for her bore any resemblance to such a feeling, never entered her mind.

She was turning over all these thoughts in her heart, or rather in her head, when she heard a knock at her door.

Madame Beaurin was the only one privileged to mount to the fifth-floor, and she came rarely except on Sundays,

when she volunteered to carry up Fleurette's breakfast, composed of a roll and a glass of milk.

"Come in!" she cried, without rising.

The invitation was all the more easily to be complied with that the key was always in the lock,—so complete was the security afforded to lodgers in the house of M. Ducresson, or rather that of madame Beaurin, and so great was Fleurette's confidence in her neighbors.

The door not opening,

"Come in," repeated Fleurette.

She heard a heavy step, and uttered a cry. Etienne stood in the middle of the room.

He had closed the door, and was looking about him with a troubled and undecided air.

"You, Etienne!" she cried, "in my room at this hour!—what is it you want?"

He made no answer, but pressed his hand to his forehead.

"Answer!—what has brought you here?"

"I do not know," he replied, after a moment's hesitation. Then turning his eyes in the direction of the young girl, he added; "Yes, I know well enough, Mademoiselle Fleurett."

"Speak then, and go."

"To speak is hard—and to go still harder—for I cannot walk very well," he replied, reeling, and falling into one of the two chairs that furnished the apartment.

He was drunk.

Fleurette enveloped herself in the bed clothing, and said with a look of contempt:

"You swore to me never to drink again."

"True."

"And yet you have just been drinking."

"Yes—on your account—on your account alone—and not enough, unfortunately—I have a mind to go back to it."

"It's the best thing you can do—go!"

"No," he said, after a little reflection—"having committed a fault I must drink—or rather, having drunk, I must—no!" he cried, checking himself—"I'm all confused—stay," making an effort to collect his thoughts—"I'm

going to tell you all, and you will see—you will admit, for you are just and reasonable, that it must be—that—that there is no way now—for it *not* to be. Zounds!" he cried, striking the table with violence, "it *shall* be; it's a question of my honor, for one is either an honest man or he is not, and I am one! I am one!" he repeated impetuously.

Fleurette saw that he was trying to excite himself, and thus give himself the courage which he lacked, and that, in her perplexing situation, gentleness would be of more avail than anger.

"Yes, Etienne," she said, "you are an honest man."

"Am I not?" he exclaimed with heat.

"You always have been."

"Except yesterday—but it was not my fault. You see it was mademoiselle Charlotte, and Pierre, and the rest of them that pushed me on to it. They are false friends."

"But I, Etienne, am your true friend."

"Yes, you, Fleurette," he continued with feeling—"and that is why—"

"What were you going to say?"

"I thought you knew it."

"Not at all," she answered, by degrees regaining confidence.

"Yesterday—was it yesterday?—yes—just after leaving you, I went to the shop to see my sister, Michelette."

"And you saw her?"

"No, she was not there, but Charlotte and Pierre, and the rest were."

"Well?"

"Well, I hardly know how it came about. They called me the faithful shepherd—the forlorn swain—in a word they laughed at me, and no one likes that. They all said," he cried, with redoubled anger, "that you cared nothing for me, Fleurette, and that you never would!"

"Who knows?"

"Yes, 'what do you know about it?' I said to them, 'she shall be mine—I'm *sure* of it!' You should have heard their shouts of laughter, as they asked mockingly, 'when? when?' These words, I hear them yet, kept ringing in my ears—'when? when?'"

"You should have paid no heed to them."

"I had not the strength for that. My brain was on fire, and my heart filled with rage. But I soon found a way to close their mouths and confound them in return."

"How was that?" asked Fleurette, uneasily.

"'Ah!' I answered, with a meaning look, 'you ask me when? when?—you are *too late asking the question.*'"

"You said that!" exclaimed Fleurette indignantly.

"Yes, and I did well. If you had only seen how taken aback they were! It was my turn to laugh. Then they insisted that I should raise my hand and swear—"

"And you did so?"

"I had to do it—there was no backing out."

"Then you are a villain!"

"Have I said to the contrary?—You should have seen how they felicitated me, Charlotte above all—how they congratulated me on my triumph!"

"But it was an infamous lie!"

"Certainly—so it becomes necessary to make it *not* one. That's what I have been saying to myself all morning, I am an honest man," he repeated, trying to rise, "and since I have sworn to it, it is necessary that it should be made true." And he advanced towards Fleurette.

"Etienne!" she cried, "if you approach another step I shall never see you again while I live!"

"I understand," he answered, stopping; "it's because I'm drunk — but, you see, without those little glasses of brandy, I should never have dared to come here and look you in the face—and—and it would only have taken a few more to so effect my sight that I wouldn't have been able to recognize you."

"You do recognize me then?" said Fleurette, with a look before which he quailed—"you recognize the girl who bestowed charity upon you—who shared with you the little she possessed, and whom you have come here to rob!"

"I!" he replied, with emotion.

"You recognize her whom you swore to protect and defend, and whom you have just now attacked!"

"Oh! no, mam'zelle Fleurette!"

"You recognize her who has always been your friend, and from whom you would snatch by force the position she might have one day given you openly and freely!"

"No! no! never!" he exclaimed, bowing his head, and extending his hands beseechingly. "Pardon, mam'zelle, pardon!"

"I shall grant it," she replied with dignity, "if you deserve it—if you obey me."

"Always!"

"First, then, open the door."

He went with a firm step, for he was already more than half sobered, and remained standing on the threshold.

"Now go," she said.

"Yes, Fleurette."

"Return home."

"Yes, Fleurette."

"And do not attempt to see me again to-day."

"You think—"

"It is my wish."

"I shall obey."

"Wait for me day after to-morrow at Michelette's."

"And then you will pardon me?"

"We shall see."

"Ah!" he cried, making a step as if to return, "you have promised—"

"Nothing,—if you begin by disobeying."

"It is just," he said, departing at once. And Fleurette soon heard the sound of his footsteps gradually growing fainter, as he descended the stairs.

Springing from her bed, she closed and locked the door, and hastened to dress.

CHAPTER XI.

According to agreement William arrived exactly at noon. Fleurette was ready. Her savings, which, for fear of being mistaken, she had counted over three or four times, amounted to eight hundred and thirty-two francs. They started together for the savings-bank.

On the way she told him her adventures of the morning

and of the day before, in detail and without withholding anything, laying before him, of her own accord and in the most artless manner, what she would never have thought of confiding to Ludovic or to Etienne, and showing him her friendship, her confidence, her entire soul.

"What you tell me is serious," said he, shaking his head.

"And why," replied she, laughing, "since Etienne obeyed, and instantly left?"

"Yes; but yesterday, before those envious and talkative girls and their lovers, all working people of the quarter—"

"It isn't true!"

"But if they believe it?"

"Well, what can I do?"

"But your reputation, Fleurette—"

"My reputation!" she exclaimed, shrugging her shoulders, "*I*, *Fleurette*, the flower-girl, the daughter of the people, am I alone to have one? And if I *have* one who will believe it, or trouble himself about it?"

"Why, your friends first."

"My friends! I have only one, William—yourself. And as you know the truth, and do not doubt me, it matters little to me what others may think."

"Certainly; but a scandal like this, although false greatly injures a young girl. And if you wished to marry—"

"I marry!" said she, bursting into laughter, "what's the good?"

"What good!" said William, astonished. "You are a singular girl, Fleurette, and your ideas are still more singular."

"My ideas. I haven't any; and I have never given what you mention to me, a single thought."

"Others may think for you. A husband *may* present himself."

"A husband! who would ever wish to marry me. Unless," said she, "it was for these eight hundred francs. True," she continued, after a moment's reflection, "I did not think of that inducement. Well, my resolution is taken; that is one reason the more why I should never think of it."

William, who was going to speak, stopped himself at these words, and kept silent.

"I am right, am I not?" she went on, "and you approve my course?"

"Certainly," coldly responded the honest porter.

They had by this time arrived at the savings-bank. Fleurette deposited her money and received her bank-book; but, to her great chagrin, William did not return with her. He had an affair which called him to another quarter. Alone, she walked along the boulevards, with admiring, rather than envious, eyes turned upon the shops full of beautiful clothing and jewelry; for she never expected the impossible, and the idea of her ever possessing such treasures never occurred to her.

She returned home early; and, after having lit her small lamp as usual, was astonished at seeing a superb bouquet in a glass of water on her mantel-piece, not a second-hand bouquet, but a new one made expressly for herself.

"What a singular idea," she thought, "to send me, a flower-girl, such a bouquet!"

But on looking at it closer she saw lying beside it a little paste-board box that she hastened to open, and which contained a very pretty gold brooch.

How to explain such a present? Who sent it to her? It couldn't have been either her friend William, or her lover Etienne; they were both too poor. Could it be M. Ludovic? —but the conversation of yesterday was not very encouraging to him, she had not been sufficiently polite for him to seek to recall himself to her recollection by such a souvenir. Nor could it be any of the other young gentlemen she had met at mademoiselle Delia's or at the other houses in the quarter.

"Let us wait," said she, "the mysterious suitor will make himself known."

She was alone, and at home, so nothing prevented her from putting on the brooch before the little gilt-framed glass which decorated her mantel-piece.

Gold and jewels are so easily carried that everyone likes them. It seems, the very first time we adorn ourselves with either, as if we had been in the habit of doing so all our lives.

Fleurette was charmed with herself, and immediately put on the airs of a great lady. She took off her new ornament merely to have the pleasure of putting it on again; and the next morning she was already decorated with it

when madame Beaurin, under I know not what pretext, entered her room.

She ought to know the donor of this brilliant gift; as she alone had the key of Fleurette's room, during the latter's absence, and was the only one who could have placed the bouquet and jewelry there. But she affected a surprise, manifested by wondering exclamations.

"However," she said, "I doubt, Mademoiselle Fleurette (it was the first time she had ever called her mademoiselle), very much whether you will remain here long, luckily for me who will no longer have to mount this eternal fifth flight."

"Why?" demanded Fleurette.

"Because mademoiselle is at the age and in the position when each month one descends a story, and you will soon be on the first floor like mademoiselle Delia."

At that name Fleurette reddened, and with an involuntary movement she carried her hand rapidly to the brooch, which she detached from her dress and threw on the mantel. madame Beaurin did not seem to notice the action.

Fleurette then hastened down stairs and went out. She looked about, at the corner, and did not see William at his usual post. He had not yet risen, which was very extraordinary, or else he was already at work.

She commenced her own with her usual activity. During the day she thought sometimes of Etienne, but oftener of the mysterious suitor, who had pleased her by exciting her curiosity. The unknown has a great charm for every imagination, and especially for that of a young girl.

In the evening, on entering her room, her first act was to glance at yesterday's gift. A new surprise! Another bouquet; and beside it a red morocco box. On opening the latter she discovered a small watch and chain of gold.

If yesterday Fleurette had been happy at receiving a gift which was altogether a superfluous luxury, how much more pleased was she with a piece of jewelry which, besides its splendor and elegance, was to her an absolute necessity. A watch was indispensable in her business, and twenty times a day, she regretted being without one. She examined this one again and again, and her admiration and delight were redoubled on perceiving that it was a repeater.

At last the hour she had fixed upon for retiring arrived,

and, exact to the minute, there arose a continuous chime of bells in the small chamber of the young girl. She fell asleep while thinking who could be the sender of the present. She could not divine who it was, but was very sure that there was such an air of gallantry, opportuneness, and delicacy about the whole transaction that it excluded the possibility of its being M. Ludovic.

The next morning, having arisen at an early hour, before going out she cast a parting glance at her watch. She was unable to resist the desire she felt to put the chain around her neck. It produced such a fine effect over her black merino dress that it was impossible for her to take it off. So she kept it on; remembering, besides, that she had so many rounds to make during the day that she would be constantly in need of knowing the time.

She wished in the first place to relate her adventure, and show her watch, to William and ask his advice; but to day, also, the porter was not at his post, and madame Jacques, the char-woman, gave Fleurette to understand that he had accepted a contract to saw several hundred cart-loads of wood, and that this important work would detain him for some days at I know not what hotel of the *faubourg Saint Germain.*

Forced for the present to do without the advice of this prudent and devoted friend, Fleurette was slowly descending the *faubourg Montmartre*, when she heard her name pronounced by a young and vibrating voice which was well known to her. It was Charlotte, who accosted her without ceremony.

"Stop, my dear Fleurette, that I may pay you my compliments!"

"Upon what?"

"It seems that you have decided to be no longer a prude, or a shrew: you have done well, it was duplicity and time lost. That is what every one said at the shop, where we all love you, myself to commence with."

"You are very good."

"Respecting the one you have chosen, one might do better; but Etienne is not bad. He has loved you for a long time; he is the brother of a friend; and if it were not for the violent tempers to which he is subject—"

All this had been delivered with such great volubility that Fleurette had not as yet been able to get in a word. She could see but one way to arrest the torrent that threatened to overwhelm her; she put her hand over the mouth of Charlotte who almost suffocated from want of air, fell to coughing; and Fleurette took advantage of this respite to say:

"Very well, dear friend, very well. I thank you for the interest you take in my affairs; but it is useless, as Etienne is nothing to me, absolutely nothing, and his good or bad qualities are entirely indifferent to me."

"Indeed!" said Charlotte, shrugging her shoulders. "Surely you are not going to deny it. Etienne himself has told us—"

"*A lie*," cried Fleurette, "a lie which you should not have believed, and which I defy anyone to prove."

"Listen, dear friend," said Charlotte, with an air of lofty composure, "that which is done *is* done; there is no getting over that. That you should be sorry now and find, as I just said, that you could have made a better choice, is only natural and is the opinion of every one. With your youth, looks, and figure you certainly ought to be able to find some one very fine, very genteel, and I think that you like that sort, though you don't say so. Isn't that your idea? Acknowledge it frankly; you know us, and that we will be mute. One owes this much to friends, upon condition of a return of confidences."

"But no!" cried Fleurette, angrily, "I repeat, I swear that Etienne has never been anything to me, and I beg you and the girls to say so, as I do, loudly and everywhere."

"Very convenient," repeated Charlotte, coolly. "After that you may as well confess it. Heavens! you will find that to be much worse. But if you have found a better one it is all very simple."

"I?" said Fleurette, indignantly.

"Certainly. And I see something that goes to prove it," said Charlotte, casting a malignant look at the gold chain Fleurette wore around her neck and the watch in her belt. "It is good taste, rich and distinguished. I have always wished just such an one—and I understand very well, my dear," she continued, with an envious laugh, "that, you do

not wish to sacrifice or break chains like these for Etienne's sake. We would all choose as you have done. Adieu!" she called out, disengaging her hands from Fleurette's, who wished to detain her and justify herself. "Adieu, I haven't time to stop longer, I would be late for the shop. My regards to your new admirer. You will present him to us, will you not?"

She had already turned the corner of the street, while Fleurette remained motionless in the same spot, but, gradually returning to herself, the latter recovered her *sang froid* and murmured:

"I will not let it pass off thus. I care little for the opinion of these girls, but I *do* care for the truth, and they shall know it"

Day before yesterday she had given Etienne an appointment at Michelettes; she ran there. But on this day the chances were against Fleurette. Michelette had risen at an early hour, an unusual thing, and had already gone to the shop. She resolved to follow her there.

She arrived in the *rue Neuve—Coquenard*, climbed the stairs, and hear a greatd noise. The half-opened door of the shop allowed the voices of men and women to be distinguished, and, besides, they were so loud that even with the door shut not a word would have been lost. She heard her own name pronounced, and stopped and listened.

"Yes, yes," said one of the girls, "Fleurette, without letting it appear, was the worst coquette of us all, and that is not a little to say!"

"It is not true" cried Michelette. I leave it to Charlotte, herself, who has never been able to find anything against her."

"I!" replied Charlotte," I do not wish to speak, because since morning I know certain things about Fleurette which delicacy prevents my mentioning."

"What?" cried Etienne, who was seated near his sister, and whose voice sounded above all the others. "What are those things which delicacy prevents your revealing?"

"It is to you, least of all, I would say them;" replied Charlotte, in an affected tone, "for you, better than any one, know what ought to be thought of Fleurette's virtue."

"And if you are deceived," responded Etienne, turning

pale and raising his voice, "if Fleurette is *still* the most honest girl of you all?"

A prolonged shout of laughter answered this audacious proposition.

"And that which you told us the other day?" asked Leopold.

"And which you swore to!" added Pierre.

"If I was boasting," responded Etienne, "if I lied?"

"You!"

"Yes, I!"

Every one cried out at the same time, and Fleurette stood outside, near the door, her heart beating rapidly, amazed at hearing Etienne make, of his own accord, such an avowal.

"Yes," continued Etienne forcibly, "it was all an invention of mine. She has accorded me nothing, I have obtained nothing. Treat me as you wish. I prefer drawing your contempt upon myself, rather than being unjust to her."

"Ah! who can tell but what you are lying again, now?" cried Leopold.

"Who can tell?" responded Etienne, his lips pale with anger. "I! who will kill the first who doubts my word; you, to commence with, Leopold!"

At these words a great tumult arose in the shop. Leopold and Etienne wished to go out, but the men and women, Michelette among the first, threw themselves before them to prevent it; and, fearing to be surprised spying and listening at the door, Fleurette hastened down the stairs into the court without having been perceived.

CHAPTER XII

Never before had Fleurette been so favorably inclined towards Etienne. Though delicacy of sentiment was almost a stranger to him, though *it* was difficult for him to appreciate in comparison with other kinds of courage, there was something heroic in this A secret instinct told her that to

accuse himself thus before the others, not to recoil before shame, to brave contempt in order to render justice to a poor girl, was an action so noble, so sublime, that it could only proceed from the highest virtue or the most ardent love. On this occasion, unfortunately, the only motive that directed Etienne was to reconquer Fleurette affection, which he had lost. What mattered it? It was a noble action of which love was the cause, and which should go to his credit.

Fleurette waited till evening, and when she supposed that Michelette had gone home she went to see her to talk with her of her brother.

She mounted to the fifth floor where Michelette resided and at the moment she knocked at the latter's door she heard a sound within which made her presume that Michelette was at home.

It was she, in fact, who opened the door, and she had a troubled and uneasy air which alarmed Fleurette.

"What is the matter?" she asked, dropping into a chair in a sort of entry which led into Michelette's room.

"My brother has been beaten on your account."

"How is that?"

"You do not know what occurred this morning at the shop?"

"Yes, indeed." And she related all that she had heard and been a witness of without herself being seen.

"You know, in reality, little or nothing," cried Michelette. "You left at the moment when everyone was trying to separate them?"

"Yes."

"And then Charlotte, to appease my brother's anger, or rather to increase it, said that he was very wrong to mix himself up in such a quarrel or to trouble himself about you; that you cared nothing for him and were in love with another, and had acknowledged it to her this very morning."

"I!" cried Fleurette, indignantly.

"She had promised, it is true, to keep silence; but in face of the threatened fight between my brother Etienne and Leopold, whom she loved, she would speak the truth to prevent a great evil. My brother, foaming with rage, repeated: It is not true! it is not true. Fleurette loves nobody—'

'Ah! you don't believe it,' continued Charlote, 'I tell you that she *does* love somebody who is very rich and has made her magnificent presents; for example, a gold watch and chain that she wore this morning—' "Ah!" cried Michelette, in the midst of her recital, and looking at Fleurette's waist, "she was right. That watch! that chain!"

"No, no!" quickly said Fleurette, "I will explain it all to you later. Go on, finish!"

"Well," tremblingly pursued Michelette, "my brother, on hearing this, rushed at Charlotte with such fury that they believed he was going to kill her. Leopold, holding a cane in his hand, threw himself before her. My brother seized the foreman's stick, and then we all drew back frightened. My brother is very good at fencing, but he was so beside himself that he struck blindly and at hazard, and Leopold, who was cooler, parried all his blows, and in return gave him one on the arm, which knocked him down and disarmed him, and they believe his arm is broken."

Fleurette uttered a cry: "And you have abandoned him?"

"No, he had just strength enough to enable him to come here."

"He is here, then?" cried Fleurette.

"Yes, in my room. He suffers very much, but I am alone and dare not leave him to seek a surgeon, for if during that time he should grow worse—"

"Am I not here?" said Fleurette, "Go get assistance, and I will remain with him as long as is necessary."

"Thanks, thanks!" said Michellette, rushing out, "I will return as quickly as possible."

Fleurette entered the sick-room, and was greeted with a joyous cry:

"It is you, Fleurette, whom I see again.—If you knew—"

"I know all you have done for me, and came to thank you." And seeing the mortal pallor produced by the intense pain his arm caused him, she continued: "I am not ungrateful, Etienne, believe me; and I will do anything I can to prove it."

"Only a word, one word. What Charlotte said is not true, is it?—you do not love any other?"

"No, I swear it to you?"

"And you haven't received that watch or chain she spoke of—Ah!" said he wildly, "what do I see? you have deceived me."

And his cheeks and lips, before pale became purple; the blood rushed to his head with such violence that Fleurette became frightened and feared congestion. She hastened to bathe his forehead and temples with cold water, and while thus occupied she explained to him in broken sentence how she had received these presents.

"I swear that I do not even know who sent them!"

"But Charlotte and the other girls will never believe it. They are not even persuaded—though I have told them the truth."

"Never mind, Etienne, that was a noble action of yours."

"They think I have accused myself in order to clear you, and they still pretend to think you are mine which is not true. It is that which enrages me, makes me furious!"

"Because your generosity has been useless? you deceive yourself, for I shall never forget it; and you shall see, Etienne, if I am not grateful and if I do not repay you."

"Ah! if that could be," said he joyfully; but his eyes returned anew to the chain, and he cried with despair: "but this unknown nobleman who loves you and makes you such presents, will carry all against me."

"Don't believe it."

"The rich gentleman," said he, shaking his head," is always preferred to the poor workingman."

"Not by me; you don't know me."

"Well! prove that you pardon me; and grant me, who am unhappy, who suffer, what you have refused to my love."

"Etienne! Etienne! what are you now asking of me?"

"Ah! you said that you were generous, grateful—it is not true."

"I am, more so than you think."

"You will not renounce your grand gentleman."

"Yes, indeed—"

"You are still thinking of him—you know him—you have seen him—"

"No, I swear it, and I will give you every proof."

"I accept, and only demand one; which you will be

unable to refuse me, unless you enjoy the troubles I am now enduring."

"I? Never!"

"Then say yes, say it," he repeated, "say it."

Troubled, beside herself, she did not respond.

"Well," continued Etienne warmly, if you do not wish to speak give me your hand, let me take it, that will mean you consent. Ah!" cried he seizing it, "it is promised, it is sworn. And Fleurette never breaks her word!"

The door opened. Michelette entered followed by M. Desroches, a young surgeon, who was little known excepting by the poor of his quarter. While awaiting reputation he possessed talent and lavished a care and assiduity on his patients which later in life, when fashion and fortune had arrived, he would not have the time to give them.

He examined Etienne's arm attentively. He saw that it was not broken; the blow, a very violent one, extending to the extremity of the elbow, had caused a complete dislocation and displacement of the shoulder. The pain had been so great that Etienne's stick had instantly dropped from his paralyzed hand. An able man, and one who thoroughly understood his profession, M. Desroches did not hesitate an instant. Without consulting his patient he seized the latter's arm and with equal address and strength he made it reenter its socket. The pain was so great that Etienne was unable to restrain one or two piercing cries.

"Courage!" said Fleurette to him.

He remained silent, overcome with pain, and tried unsuccessfully to force as mile.

"Now," said the doctor, "try and move your arm."

Etienne made the attempt, but stopped, saying:

"It hurts me too much."

"No matter it must be done."

That was not Etienne's opinion, to whom anger gave strength and courage, but now the anger had passed away, and pain reigned in its stead, and if Fleurette had not been there he would probably have sent the doctor away. The latter, having assured himself by the movements of the sufferer that the dislocation was reduced, rendered the arm immovable by a bandage artistically tied, and forbade his patient to use it for six or seven days.

"Remain all that time without moving my arm!" cried Etienne; "what will my employer say?"

"He must do like yourself," said Michelette, "have patience."

"But I shall die of ennui!"

"Who knows," said Fleurette, smiling, "perhaps some one will come to see you."

And the invalid consoled by this hope became resigned to his condition.

On her way home Fleurette reflected upon the promise she had made to Etienne. During the night she thought of it still more. Carried away by an impulse of gratitude and pity, she had promised; she was unable to contradict him; and did not see any way of withdrawing her word.

What reason could she give the poor fellow who had been almost killed for her sake? What reason could she give herself? How justify her ingratitude and bad faith to him? She did not love him, it is true; she loved no one, she had not an idea that any other love was possible to her. Her reputation, as she herself had said, was a very weak argument to make use of. Mademoiselle Charlotte and her companions seemed to be decided that *it* was over with, and that she had made a very good bargain.

There was but one person to whom she could have told the embarrassing situation in which she found herself. That person was William. But madame Jacques had told her that he would be gone for seven or eight days, and, to tell the truth, she was only half sorry; she would never have known how to make such a confession to honest William.

The promise, or rather mistake, was made, and not being able to regain it, Fleurette became resigned, or rather she shook off her thoughts. She had some days before her, that was all that was necessary.

Etienne, on his side, had difficulty in moderating his joy. He had attained the end of all his desires; his love and his pride were satisfied. His comrades, handsomer and better off than himself, would no longer be able to make jests upon his lack of good fortune; and then a conquest such as that of Fleurette ought to bring him others.

As yet he had no reason to doubt her good faith, and he was still surer when she came to see him the next day. She

was not alone, it is true, but came in with Michelette. They had come to see how the wounded one fared. One was his sister, the other had been defended by him.

If anyone was disturbed or discontented over the accident of the day before it was Etienne's employer, who thus saw himself deprived of his workman for some days. Despite his crabbed character he was ordinarily gallant enough towards Michelette, and she, in order to appease his wrath and plead her brother's cause, soon left Fleurette and Etienne to themselves.

For an instant Fleurette was silent, then tremblingly and with lowered eyes, she said:

"Etienne—yesterday I made you a promise."

"That promise is my life, my blood," the young man quickly cried, "I would prefer death to renouncing it?"

Fleurette gave a start.

"Do you wish, perchance, to withdraw it?" cried he, his features discomposed and pale as death.

"No," said Fleurette, "I never break my word, as you know, and if I ever should—"

"Well!" said Etienne, his lips trembling with emotion.

"Well!" coldly responded the young girl, "you may kill me, I will let you."

"That is right!" murmured Etienne.

"And—I did not come to withdraw my promise, but to beseech you, Etienne, who are a brave and honest young man, to return it to me—"

"I!"

"And wait a little longer."

"I!" he repeated, with a fury which he made an effort to master.

"If you will do that I will be eternally grateful to you, and you will gain, perhaps, the only thing which I have heretofore denied you."

"What?"

"My love."

"If you do not love me who then do you love?"

"No one more than you," replied Fleurette. "It is a good and sincere friendship, a sister's affection, that I have long had for you; but I have frequently heard those girls at the shop speak of love; and in the seductive pictures they

drew I never saw anything resembling the feeling I have for you."

"That is sufficient, I am content with that. I do not desire more. If there is not enough love on your part there is on mine to more than make up for it. So I claim your promise, you have given it to me, it is mine, you just now admitted it."

"It is true," turning pale, "I do not deny it."

"That is all I ask. The doctor has said that in eight days I will be well. That will be on Sunday. We will go out for a walk together."

"Very well."

"Or if you prefer that no one should see us—"

"It is indifferent to me," said Fleurette, with a discouraged air.

"That's better," said Etienne, delighted. "I will go and wait for you at the Clichy barrier, Father Lathuile's, where I shall order our dinner. I will be there at four o'clock, and you at half-past four—will you not?"

She dropped her head and did not answer.

"Etienne! Etienne!" cried several workmen, calling to him, "here is the doctor come to visit you."

He turned towards them, made some steps in the direction of the doctor, but before reaching him turned back again to make his adieu to Fleurette. He did not find her, she had escaped and run away.

"All right," said he, "she shall not escape me always. *She is mine*!"

CHAPTER XIII.

The next day neither madame Beaurin, mademoiselle Justine, M. Rymbaud, nor any of those with whom Fleurette had relations would have suspected what had happened.

She had recovered her habitual sang-froid and attended with her customary activity to the business of the day.

She had done all she could not to enter the path in which she had been thrust against her will; in spite of her

efforts fate had over-ruled her, and submissive, like the Orientals, to fatality, she no longer disputed it. She accepted it, she abandoned herself to it. It was written above.

Observe that for her the question was not one of morals. Was it right? Was it wrong? These she completely ignored; also that was not what made her hesitate. A secret instinct, which she was unable to account for to herself, told her that contrary to her companions she would find herself neither happy nor satisfied in such an existence. But, after all this was not clear to her; it had not been proven to her, and since she had promised, her resolution was taken, she would no longer bother herself about it. Nor did she.

During the eight days which followed her interview with Etienne she thought no more of him. The Clichy barrier, Father Lathuile's, nor that improvised marriage which, before the annexation of the suburbs to Paris, was vulgarly called a marriage of the thirteenth district.

Only yesterday she had recollected that it had been six days at least since she had seen Michelette, which was scarcely being polite towards her future sister-in-law. She therefore directed her steps towards the latter's garret.

On the dark and narrow stairway that led to Michelette's rooms, she met on the second landing a man, whose features the darkness prevented her from seeing. His dress was that of a workman; he was bare-headed and had such an agitated air that he barely missed in his descent overthrowing Fleurette on the stairs, but he did not stop to make any excuses. Fleurette, who was not easily offended, continued her long ascent, and arrived at the sixth floor.

She knocked. It was some time before there was any response. She believed there was no one at home and started to leave, when the door was opened.

Michelette appeared, and the air of terror imprinted on her features was dissipated on seeing her young friend.

"Ah! how glad I am to see you," she said as they entered her room, and Fleurette felt that the hand which held her's was still trembling.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing—I was suffering a little today, and was unable to go and get news of my brother."

"Nor I either," naively said Fleurette."

"Nor even to go to the shop."

"What is the matter with you?"

"A bad headache," answered Michelette, without thinking much of what she said.

"Ah!" cried Fleurette, observing her closely, "has a headache produced the black bruise I see on your forehead and that cut on your cheek?"

"You believe—" said Michelette, blushing,

"Why certainly, it bleeds." And she hastened to wipe off some drops of blood she saw on her companion's face.

"I wonder how that happened?" stammered Michelette. "I may have rubbed off the skin without knowing it."

This response appeared rather singular to Fleurette, who did not, however, insist on any further explanation. She wished to sit down on one of the two chairs in the room and found it occupied by a workman's cap, which had doubtless been forgotten there. Michelette hastened to seize it and put it away. Her forehead and cheeks were purple.

Just then two knocks at the door given in a distinct and particular manner made her tremble. She turned pale, and, although scarcely able to stand, hastened to a sort of entry, which we have mentioned before, and which served as an ante-chamber to the young work-woman's appartment. She closed the door after her, leaving Fleurette alone and very much astonished.

She heard the door which led to the stairs open, then a man's step, and a voice, which was not unknown to her, roughly utter these words:

"I was already in the street, I returned for my cap, which I had forgotten."

"Here it is," said Michelette in a low tone, and probably making him a sign not to speak so loud, for the man replied:

"Why not? Who is there?"

A low voice answered: "A woman."

"I don't believe it."

Then some one spoke in a low voice and for some time, and probably named Fleurette, for the man muttered in a lower tone: "It is possible, I believe I met her coming up. But listen now, listen well to what I am going to say."

Then the unknown whispered to Michelette, who tremblingly attempted from time to time to put in a supplicating word; but after a while he elevated his voice and said imperiously:

"I desire it, I wish it!"

"I will obey," murmured Michelette.

"And from to-day," replied the unknown in a loud voice, noisily closing the outside door and rushing down stairs.

Michelette delayed coming back for an instant, probably taking the time to dry her eyes, for when she entered they were red, and it was evident she had been weeping.

"I beg your pardon for having left you alone," she said, trying to recover herself.

"You owe me no excuses, you are not your own mistress. I am only astonished—that you are not more so."

"Why? What is it? What have you heard?" cried Michelette, trembling.

"Nothing, I was unable to distinguish more than a few words. They were these spoken in a loud voice: '*I desire it, I wish it!*'" Michelette turned pale. "How does anyone here, besides yourself, have the right to say '*I wish it.*' That should never happen in *my* garret."

"Possibly," said Michelette, lowering her eyes, "if, like me, you had had the unhappiness and shame to become a slave, and if in your slavery you should find yourself unprotected—"

"Am I not?"

"Ah! you could do nothing," cried the poor girl, breaking into tears and throwing herself into Fleurette's arms.

"Don't cry, don't cry," said Fleurette, wiping Michelette's tears away. "Speak, tell me all, and we will see afterwards what must be done."

"Well it was Pierre, the cabinet-maker, who was there."

"The one," Fleurette interrupted, "who was of our donkey party at Montmorency?"

"Yes."

"And whom I have frequently seen since at the shop in the *rue Neuve-Coquenard?*"

"Himself. More than three years ago he told me I was pretty, waited for me at the shop-door, and accompanied me home."

"Yes," again interrupted Fleurette, "like your brother Etienne when we returned together to my quarter."

"And then on the way he repeated that he loved me."

"Like your brother, Etienne."

"But I did not love him yet."

"Like me," said Fleurette.

"But that comes in the end—it is very simple! A young fellow all the time saying that he loves you, that he will never love but you. When he is present one listens to him, when absent one thinks of him. And then the other young girls who are constantly saying: 'Are you a fool, what does it serve you to be sentimental and prudish? Who believes in it? Do like the rest of us and take a lover.'"

"Just what they said to me."

"Well, what can you expect? Unhappily I listened to them, and I have not passed a single day since without repenting it."

"Bah!" cried Fleurette, with an astonished gesture.

"Not a day without suffering or tears."

"Tell me all about it," said Fleurette.

"In the first place, after a short while his tenderness greatly diminished, and the less he loved me the more jealous he became. I was unable to see any one without being beaten."

"Beaten," indignantly cried Fleurette, "beaten!"

"Very frequently, to-day, for instance," said she, pointing to her bruised forehead and cheeks, "for a mere nothing he put himself into a passion, for he is brutal and violent."

"As much so as your brother Etienne?"

"Nearly. But that is nothing—. Pierre has talent, as a workman; but he is idle, and loves play and wine; it is thus that he spends all his money, and, when it is gone, I have to lend him mine."

"At least he repays you?"

"Not always. That would be nothing, however," continued Michelette sweetly, "I could make up for that with a few hours extra work—that would be nothing if he was good to me, but he orders me so harshly to do things sometimes so painful. Just now on learning that you were here, Fleurette, he said to me angrily: 'I do not wish her to come here, I do not wish it!'—And what reason shall I

give her?' I answered—'That's your affair.'—'But she is my best friend.'—'That is *my* right, you should have no friend but me. Arrange it so that she never puts her foot here again, to commence from to-day.'"

"Well! what did you answer?"

"I wept, and bowed my head."

"How! you will obey him?" said Fleurette indignantly.

"But what can I do?" said the poor girl, regarding her with a look of fear and grief. "What do you wish?"

"What I wish is that you should send him about his business."

"Oh! no, no," cried Michelette in terror. "I would like to, but it is impossible."

"And why?"

"It makes me shudder to only think of it, I shouldn't dare."

"Why?" repeated Fleurette forcibly.

"I am so in the habit of obeying and fearing him that if I should tell him to leave he would beat me."

"Possibly, but he would leave."

"No, he would not; and the next day he would commence over again. Every day there would be fresh scenes. It is better to say nothing and submit."

"Submit! but you will die!"

"I have thought so—but once tied, do you see, one is unable to disengage ones'self. One must give up, obey, above all without complaint, for they owe us nothing. We are not like those who have husbands. They are happy."

"Are they not beaten?" ingenuously asked Fleurette.

"Sometimes, but all the world is on their side, whilst when we suffer they cry 'serve them right!'"

Fleurette remained some time with her head between her hands, then looking at Michelette, she said:

"Things shall not go on like this. Have confidence in me, and we will see."

She returned home; not to sleep, but to reflect.

The doctor had yesterday been to see Etienne, but it was to be his last visit. He had given him leave to use his arm and to go out. Etienne felt his heart throb when he thought of the happiness promised him for the next day.

Discreet, this time he had not spoken to any of his comrades, and not even to his sister. Desirous of reinstating himself in his employer's good graces, whom a week of idleness had displeased, he had done double work on Saturday, and had even worked half of Sunday.

Free, after two o'clock, his sole occupation had been to try and make himself handsome. He had taken pains with his toilet, which had never been more elegant, and never had he taken more time to it, for it was a quarter to four when he directed his steps towards the Clichy barrier. His gait was proud and his air radiant. Although it had been agreed with Fleurette that this first interview should be altogether private, he would not have been sorry, perhaps, had his incognito been discovered; and he looked about him from time to time, with a curious eye, to see if he was not recognised by some comrade.

He arrived at father Lathuile's, beyond the barrier, the *Freres Provencaux* of the poorer classes. He secured a particular cabinet at the end of the garden in which he installed himself, ordered a modest dinner (magnificent for him), and then, his heart full of hope and counting the minutes, he waited. The time appeared long to him. He had no watch. No one appeared. He walked in the garden, then returned to his *salon*. It seemed to him as if a century had elapsed, and impatience, even anger, commenced to show itself, when the door opened.

Fleurette appeared in a simple and charming toilet. He hastened forward to receive her, uttering a cry of joy, a joy which was considerably diminished on seeing his sister with her. He turned first red, then pale, and appeared put out.

"I was sure of the effect we would produce upon him," cried Fleurette. "Yes, Etienne, it is a family *fete*. We wished, your sister and I, to celebrate your convalescence; we have brought you sincere friendship and good appetites For may part, I am dying of hunger."

"And I, also," said Michelette.

"To table!" called out Fleurette, on seeing one of the waiters of the establishment enter.

All this was said with so much ease and gaiety that Etienne thought Fleurette had undoubtedly run against his sister by an unforeseen chance that would be explained to

him, or that she had been brought, through a sense of modesty on Fleurette's part, to lessen the constraint and embarrassment of a first rendezvous. After all it mattered little to him; for in the evening, after conducting his sister to her home, he intended, in his plans, to take Fleurette to *her's*.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was a gay dinner. Each was content. Etienne, because he was animated by hope; Fleurette, as if sustained by a good resolution; and Michelette, because she was with her friend and her brother, and, if it must be confessed, also perhaps because Pierre was not present.

They drank Etiennés health; Fleurette drank to friendship. Etienne, seated near her and interpreting differently the toast, returned thanks, and touched her hand in an expressive manner; but the young girl did not appear to comprehend him, an ignorance which did not astonish, but charmed, him.

After dinner, which Etienne found very long, they promenaded outside the barrier. It was winter, and night came on early. Etienne proposed that they should take his sister home first, which was agreed to, and when the street-door had closed upon Michelette, he cried out:

"At last we are alone, and it is *not* without difficulty, I have so many things to say to you."

"And I also," responded Fleurette.

"I am going to take you home; give me your arm."

"Willingly."

They began to walk along together: Etienne, radiant with joy pressed the young girl's arm against his heart and she, not appearing to notice it, said in a calm voice:

"Let us first speak of family affairs."

"To-morrow."

"No, at once. I am charged by your sister to make you, as soon as we should be alone, a confession at which she did not wish to be present."

"What the devil is the matter with her?" cried Etienne impatiently.

"Do you not suspect," said Fleurette slowly, "that your comrade Pierre, the cabinet-maker, is Michelette's lover?"

"Yes."

"And you have not spoken of it to him?"

"No, because I did not wish to know it."

"It was wrong, then?" continued Fleurette, regarding him closely.

"I did not say that," responded Etienne, embarrassed, Michelette is old enough to know what she is about, and, after all, she is her own mistress."

"It is because she is her own mistress that she has decided, from to-morrow, to break with him, and as it may possibly make a noise at the shop she wishes to acquaint you with it in advance, so you may not be astonished."

"All right!"

"And that you may know whom to stand up for."

"I thank her! But what has that to do with us?" said Etienne, tenderly regarding the young girl and pressing her to his heart.

"Much!" said she, disengaging the arm which Etienne had passed around her waist.

"That does not prevent *us* from loving," pursued Etienne, increasing his pace. "But I cannot explain myself here, and as soon as we have arrived at your room—"

"To what good?" she tranquilly responded. "Speak now, and be quick, for we have almost arrived."

"What does it matter? We will talk it over in your room."

"No," said she. Etienne stopped as if he had heard imperfectly.

"How, 'no!'" cried he, "it is impossible! and why 'no!'?"

"Because," replied Fleurette slowly and reflectively, "Pierre has beaten Michelette."

"That's no reason," impatiently cried the young man.

"Yes it is, a very strong; for I have sworn to myself that I will never give anyone the right to beat me, nor to speak to me as a master."

The argument was so unforeseen and so just that for a

moment Etienne appeared disconcerted. At length he recovered himself, and replied with unconcealed emotion:

"Ah! who tells you that I would speak to you as a master, or that I would ever lift my hand against you?"

"Who tells me! why your own character and habits, and the anger which at this very instant is boiling in your veins, and may break forth at any moment."

"Even if it should!" cried Etienne, who unwillingly felt that she was right, "would it not be right after such treatment, for you have made a fool of me."

"No, I acted in good faith."

"You have deceived me!"

"I deceived myself."

"But," cried Etienne, whose irritation constantly increased, "you have promised—you have sworn to me—"

"It is true."

"Solemnly sworn."

"I admit it."

"To such an extent that you said: 'If I break my word I permit you to kill me!'"

"And I permit it yet," said the young girl.

"What do you dare to say?"

"That I prefer death!" tranquilly responded Fleurette. "One can be killed but once, but one may be beaten every day."

This *sang-froid* would have disarmed any other than Etienne; but he could not believe that Fleurette had told him the truth; it seemed too improbable. He imagined that another motive, another engagement, another lover was the cause of her breaking her word and withdrawing herself from his arms.

They had arrived at Fleurette's door, and the sight of it irritating his hopes yet more made the storm, already too long restrained, burst forth. Beside himself, furious, he cried:

"I will not be the dupe of another's profit. I will follow you to your room, or else—"

While thus speaking he quickly shook off her arm and, raising his hand, brutally struck her.

"Thanks!" coolly said Fleurette. "You have proved to me that I was right. And now," she continued, with a

gesture full of dignity, "go! I no longer promise you anything. You have freed me from my oath, and even from any remorse."

Etienne's rage was now boundless, he was a maniac. Raving, he was about to proceed to extremities when the arm, which he had again lifted, was all at once seized and arrested by a vigorous hand which held him as in a vice and forced him to remain motionless.

Fleurette glanced at her defender, uttered a glad cry, and threw herself into his arms.

"William!" she said, "you have returned."

But he, before answering her, turned to Etienne, saying:

"You see that I am the stronger."

William possessed, in fact, the form of a Hercules and nerves like steel, and the arm which he at that moment held was the same which had been recently dislocated.

Etienne uttered a cry of pain. William loosened his grasp but still retained hold of him.

"Good-night, Fleurette," said William, "return home till to-morrow."

"Till to-morrow," she said, "I will be ready to see you at as early an hour as you wish."

Etienne gave a start, but the door closed and Fleurette was safe at home, William freed his prisoner and said:

"If you are not satisfied you can find me at any time. You know where I live," and he pointed to the corner of the street.

"*Au revoir* then," said Etienne who, furious, disappeared.

Early the next morning Fleurette opened the door of her little room to her friend William, whom she again embraced and overwhelmed him with thanks, questions, and reproaches for his long absence.

"Ten days at least! What have you been doing all that time?"

"Let us commence with yourself," said William. "What has happened to *you?*" he asked uneasily. "How did these quarrels come about, to commence with, that of last night?"

She related to him forgetting nothing, all that had happened since his departure. She concealed nothing, nor did she leave him in ignorance of any of the sentiments, good or bad, which had agitated her.

It was her life, her entire soul, which she displayed before her friend's eyes, with a *naivete* and candor which profoundly moved him. He at first listened with a severe air which, as she went on, became indulgent and even tender. He frequently murmured, with emotion:

"Yes,—yes—that was like an honest girl!"

"Nevertheless," he said in a tone still showing a trace of resentment, "you promised to be his."

"That is true."

"Then you loved him a little?"

"Not at all."

"And you accorded him," he pursued, with warmth, "what others, who love you much better would be only too happy to obtain at the price of their lives."

"What would you have? I thought myself obliged."

"Ah! Fleurette, what a head yours is!'

"Happily I am disengaged, I am quit of him, I am free."

"And will you never again commit such imprudences?"

"Never! you may be sure; for you would not always be able, like yesterday, to come to my aid. But what has happened to you, my kind William, and what have you to tell me?"

William's recital was not long. He had found work at the other end of Paris. It was not only sawing wood, but also bottling wine and arranging an immense cellar; a confidential work which would keep him in that quarter for some days, and on which in his present condition of mind (a detail he did not tell Fleurette) he accepted with pleasure, in order to keep away from her. The rich manufacturer, for whom he was working, was a Swiss, who had given him news of Schaffhouse. William had learned through him that he had inherited a small family property, and since he had had only one idea.

"What?" asked Fleurette.

"To return to my own country, and establish myself there; and for that a wife will be necessary, a good wife; and to realize this dream," he said, laughing and rubbing his hands, "it is first necessary to look well around one."

While speaking his eyes dwelt in turn upon Fleurette and her humble surroundings. All at once his looks, before

so happy and joyous, became gloomy and disturbed. He perceived, hanging over the mantle-piece, the watch, brooch and gold chain, which Fleurette possessed through the generosity of the unknown.

"What are these," he said.

She told him how the jewels had been mysteriously sent to her.

"It is a lover who sends them to you," he said coldly.

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"And not to know who it is!" said Fleurette, striking her forehead. "Ah! how I wish I knew him!"

"Why?"

"Oh! just to know. I have always been curious."

"And do you wear these jewels?" asked William severely.

"Certainly: willing or not I have to, as I am unable to return them."

"At least you are not obliged to wear them."

"What harm is there in it?"

"A very great one. He who sends them has intentions."

"What's that to me. I laugh at him and his intentions."

"He will believe that you welcome them if he sees that you accept his presents."

"Rest easy," cried she quickly," as soon as I know who he is I will return them to him."

"And until then," continued William, "you will no longer carry them?"

"Ah that would be a pity!" she said, pouting, "they are so pretty!"

"Pretty or not you ought not to wear them any longer, if it is only for what the world will say."

"I would like to know what it matters to the world—or to you either?" she said impatiently.

"I care a great deal," he responded seriously.

"Then you are more difficult to please than I am. I care nothing."

William sadly regarded her, and, as he was leaving, said:

"You are mistress, act as you please."

"Just in time!" said she to herself in reference to his leaving. "He is getting unreasonable. I don't know what is the matter with him to-day."

Next day she put her gold chain round her neck, as usual, descended the faubourg Montmartre, and perceiving William at a distance, made him a friendly gesture which he returned. But he turned aside without her perceiving it and brushed away a tear. The next day she did not meet him; the day after that, again not seeing him and becoming uneasy, she determined to go and learn something of him from madame Jacques.

"William," said that honest woman, lowering her head, "was too good a man for this country, and has returned to Switzerland."

"Gone!" cried Fleurette, "gone without speaking to me, without embracing me! then he has forgotten me. Didn't he speak of me to you?"

'Almost all day," responded the charwoman naively.

"And not to bid me adieu—ah! that was bad!"

Fleurette went away dismayed. She understood that she had lost her best friend. She concealed her face in her hands, and wept. It was for the first time in her life.

CHAPTER XV.

That evening she returned home sad and pensive. She was undressing before her glass when she perceived on the wooden mantle of her chimney-piece a bouquet and a very elegant and coquettish little white pasteboard box.

"Another present from the unknown!" she said.

She could not conceal from herself that these presents had not pleased William, her friend and censor. An idea, a secret instinct, which she was unable to clearly account for, told her that these jewels, which she had appeared to care so much for, perhaps had something to do with William's sudden departure.

Also, remembering his recommendation, Fleurette's first

impulse was not to open the mysterious box. But whom would her discretion serve? Whether or not she abstained from examining the contents, what advantage would result from her abstinence. No one could see her, she was alone; and since she had looked at the two other presents, she could do the same with the third; she would be none the more culpable. So, like a modern Pandora, slowly and softly she lifted the cover of the box, not without first throwing an uneasy glance around her to assure herself that no one was watching, and perceived a small sky-blue cashmere shawl, the prettiest and most coquettish that had ever covered the shoulders of a grisette. Her first impulse, an irresistable one, was to unfold it, and, an instant later, without thinking, the shawl was upon her shoulders. It was very becoming; warm, soft and of a beautiful shade. Fleurette had never worn a cashmere, neither had any of her companions.

All at once she uttered a cry. She was positively certain, now, that she knew the unknown.

To tell the truth, she had had some suspicions, but never any proofs, and the one she suspected of this generosity, far from seeking to derive any advantage from it, had not even boasted of it, a reserve which did not appear to belong to his character.

She remembered that some days before she had talked about a cashmere with Justine, in mademoiselle Delia's boudoir and that M. Ludovic Durussel, seated in an easy-chair, his feet stretched out towards the fire, and a cigar his mouth, had assisted at their conference.

Justine was proud of a little three-quarter shawl, of a pastage, which her mistress had presented to her. Fleurette, greatly admiring it, had naively avowed that she had never yet touched cashmere, and that the dream of her life was to own such an one, a dream however, small as it was, impossible to realize.

She also recalled that mademoiselle Justine had laughingly asked her which was her favorite color, and that she had replied; "sky-blue; it becomes me best."

Now it was evident that M. Ludovic, who, while smoking his cigar, seemed drowsy and not attending to anything, had heard them, and that this small cashmere was the

sequel to the mysterious crusade that he had undertaken against mademoiselle Fleurette's heart and virtue, an attempt the latter was determined to baffle.

This determination occupied her thoughts all night, and at the same time she thought of M. Ludovic, her first meeting with whom, it is true, had left disagreeable memories but who latterly, it must be acknowledged, had presented himself under a more favorable aspect.

Not that Fleurette had been tempted by his tender proposals, but she was obliged to confess that there was an elegance in his manners and a politeness in his tone that would be vainly sought for in Etienne, the work-man.

Still she understood that William had been entirely right; that the day when she meet Ludovic at mademoiselle Delia's she had on the brooch and gold chain, which he must have seen, and that to accept his gifts was to authorize his pursuit, which she was far from intending.

As her resolutions once taken were promptly executed she arose, dressed, folded the shawl, replaced it and the jewelry in the box, and went out.

She remembered having often heard M. Ludovic's address mentioned at mademoiselle Delia's, so it was not necessary for her to make any inquiries.

Without consulting anyone (William was gone), without for an instant thinking that her proceeding was most singular and hazardous (her intention was good, that sufficed her), she put herself *en route*. It was almost ten o'clock when she arrived at the house inhabited by madame Durussel and her son Ludovic.

It was a magnificent mansion constructed in the modern taste and style, gold and bronze, voilet-ebony, and shining cedar as far as the grand stairway. The vestibule paved with the most precious marbles.

Fleurette, astonished, stopped before the porter's lodge, which was a magnificent *salon* with a Sienna marble mantelpiece, a gold clock, and a mahogany piano. Mademoiselle Pamela, the concierge's daughter, was a pupil at the conservatory.

"What do wish, mademoiselle?" asked a fine gentleman, with a paternal air, black clothes and a white cravat whom one would have taken for the proprietor, and who

seemed standing there to receive his guests. "What do you wish? what do you want?"

Fleurette, confused, waited a moment before replying, and the Swiss, coming to her aid, continued;

"I understand! for madame?"

"No," said she," for monsieur."

"Monsieur Ludovic!" said the concierge, with a wicked smile, "that is different, mademoiselle. Please ascend the little staircase, at the right of the court, to the first floor."

Fleurette mounted a small stairway, warmed by a hot-air stove, and whose steps were covered with a rich Aubusson carpet. At the right was a balustrade in mahogany and crystal.

Arrived at the first floor she rang. A young and apparently, intelligent groom answered.

"Mademoiselle wishes to see monsieur?" said he with a sprightly air.

"Yes but your master does not expect me,"

"Mademoiselle is one of those whom he always expects. Who shall I announce?"

"Mademoiselle Fleurette."

An instant later she heard hurried steps, Ludovic himself hastened to meet her. He was in morning dress, and wore a magnificent dressing-gown.

"It is you, my dear child," cried he, "you condescend to make me a visit! When Gabriel announced you I was unable to believe in such happiness. Enter, I pray you; make yourself at home."

Fleurette without waiting to be urged unceremoniously entered a delicious boudoir, containing all the refinements of luxury and comfort. She had never seen anything to equal it, not even at Delia's, who was the leader of the princesses of the Bréda dynasty. Here was the richness which was to be found at her apartments, and, in addition, the good taste and elegance which she lacked.

Madame Durussel had taken pleasure in herself arranging her son's appartments; and they were really remarkable for the choice upholstery and elegant furniture they contained, as well as for the pictures and *objets d'art* which decorated their walls.

Ludovic was overjoyed at a visit, or rather a good for

tune, so unforeseen; his complexion was brilliant, his eyes shone, and his heart beat rapidly.

"Sit down there," he said pointing to a sofa at the corner of the mantel.

"And you *there*," said indicating an easy chair opposite to, but some distance from, her.

There was in the young girls gesture something so frank, and at the same time so absolute, that Ludovic, without thinking of objecting, found himself, before he knew it seated opposite her.

"I have come here, monsieur," she said, "in regard to an important and grave affair."

"You!" he cried, "have come here to treat me to a grave affair?"

"You are not used to it; neither am I. How can it be helped?" said she, smiling, "We will each of us make a beginning and come out of it as well as we can."

"It is true, then?" said Ludovic, astonished.

"Perfectly," she replied with the greatest coolness.

She took from beneath her mantle the little box she had brought with her, and prepared to commence the conversation. Ludovic dismayed at the course she was taking did not know how to prevent it, when his groom, Gabriel, reentered with monsieur's breakfast. Gabriel was curious and not sorry to be able, if he was asked, to give his opinion on his master's new choice, his future mistress.

Fleurette remained silent when he entered. The little groom placed the tea on a round table which he pushed near the fire. Then Ludovic, glancing towards Fleurette, said graciously:

"I am sure that you have not breakfasted."

"It is true," said the young girl heedlessly, without thinking of what she said.

"Gabriel! a cup, a cover!" cried Ludovic.

"No!" said Fleurette, "I don't want any, I did not come for that."

"No matter! it is late, very late; your health before all, and I will not listen to, nor treat of, any affair, important or not, until you have first breakfasted."

"Very well!" said Fleurette, who after all, was hungry, and also curious to know to what use were put all the richly

carved silver utensils set out on the round table, for instance the tea-pot, sugar bowl, and above all the urn, a steam apparatus, the noise and steam of which puzzled the young girl very much.

Ludovic hastened to serve his young guest with the most delicate care and attention, He was occupied with *her* only. Fearing that the tea was not entirely to her taste, he had made a sign to Gabriel who instantly descended to the *chef* and in a short while returned from the kitchen with some choice and elegant dishes, the existence of which Fleurette had never even suspected, but whose merits she greatly appreciated.

Without intending it, she compared this repast with the one she had recently shared with Etienne at Father Lathuile's. These glasses, plate, damask linen of Saxony, and Sevres porcelain appeared magical and fairy-like to her. She fully believed in the tale of "The Thousand and One Nights." The frame so set off the picture that Ludovic, with his present advantageous surroundings, seemed altogether a different man to her.

How then could she defend herself from the fascination and seduction that surrounded this luxury since she herself, formerly so rational and practical, experienced difficulty just now in resisting it. Everything transported her into a new world; even the patchouli, with which the air was impregnated, a fashionable perfume, the odor of which was so fragrant and delicate that her senses as well as her ignorance were charmed.

After the breakfast Ludovic offered her a cup of hot tea which she accepted, like the rest from curiosity rather than from desire. Seated on a comfortable little sofa she enjoyed the sweetened liquid which she drank for the first time; she partook of it slowly, abandoning herself to the delicious reveries that ordinarily follow a good repast.

Ludovic relieved her of the empty cup and the young girl remained silent plunged in her reflections.

Ludovic made a sign to Gabriel to remove the tray and to withdraw, which he accordingly did, being accustomed to such orders; and the soft carpet was mute under his steps and the door of the room, in closing, awakened no indiscreet echo.

Ludovic was at one corner of the mantel; Fleurette at the other, her feet resting on the gilt andirons, her head leaning on the back of the sofa; smiling, and with lips half open, she regarded the ceiling, representing cupids playing amidst roses.

For an instant the young man admired this gracious pose, then murmured in a low voice:

"What are you thinking of, Fleurette?"

Fleurette quickly raised her head, rubbed her eyes as if recovering from a dream, and resolutely shaking off the torpor which seemed creeping over her, smilingly replied:

"I was thinking of our first interview, and was saying to myself that it was wrong to expect you rich and grand noblemen to be anything else than fops and saucy fellows."

"How?" cried Ludovic astonished.

"Doubtless, it is so easy," pursued she, squaring herself in her chair, "to allow one's self to become intoxicated by fine words and comforts, that I can understand that there are many people, to commence with myself, who forget a great many things."

"What do you mean?" cried the young man joyously.

"That means," tranquilly replied Fleurette, who had recovered her habitual *sang-froid*, "that I came here on an important piece of bussiness, and that I forgot it. Let us speak of it now."

"Very well!" said Ludovic, a little troubled at the young girl's calmness.

Fleurette took from the mantel the box she had brought, placed it on her knees, and, sinking back into the comfortable seat she occupied, looked Ludovic straight in the face and said:

"Monsieur, here are some very pretty things which do not belong to me, and which for some time I have wished to return to him who has offered them to me, but I did not know him. It it only since yesterday that I have found him, and I come like an honest girl as I am, to say to him: 'I do not wish to, neither can I, accept these presents.'"

She had opened the box; Ludovic, stopping her with his hand, gravely said:

"Mademoiselle, I do not understand what you have done me the honor to tell me."

"How Monsieur!" cried she, stupefied, "is it not you who have bribed my portress, madame Beaurin?"

"In the first place, mademoiselle, I never bribe any one; and in this case I would not have addressed myself to madame Beaurin."

Fleurette had not recovered from her surprise.

"How, monsieur, it is not you who have had placed on my mantle-piece these bouquets, this chain, and this watch?"

"I wish I had thought of it, but I confess that the idea never entered my head."

"But this shawl?" said she, displaying it, "this blue cashmere shawl, which I spoke to Justine about the other day in mademoiselle Delia's boudoir, while you, pretending to sleep, listened to us."

"If I acknowledge myself to blame, mademoiselle, "he said with the same gravity, "it is because I slept while you were speaking; but the fact is that being asleep I heard nothing."

"And yet," said she impatiently, "this shawl, exactly like the one I dreamt of, came to me the next day. Who sent it then?"

Ludovic smilingly regarded the young girl, and answered gaily;

"You ask me, who sent you this shawl? You should not address that question to me but to mademoiselle Justine. Has she not other friends besides me to whom she could have related your conversation? Am I the only young man received at mademoiselle Delia's, the only one who finds you charming? And yet scarcely have I dared to say it to you sometimes *en passant*, for you are very severe, without any appearance of it."

"I!"

"Yourself! We young men of fashion have some self-respect and we care for our reputations, but we do not like to receive a check and only make ourselves known when we are sure of success."

"Ah! is that the motive—?"

"Probably. If you are really anxious to discover this mysterious lover—"

"I am, very!"

"I will make inquiries, and to aid me in my inquiries first permit me to see these marvelous presents."

"Behold them!" said she, showing them to him.

"Oh! oh!" said he examining them with disdain: "here is a brooch of very little value."

"The value makes no difference, monsieur."

"The style at least makes some; it is in very bad taste."

"You think so!" said she, astonished," I found it charming."

"You are very good. I know that *I* should never offer you so paltry a present, and one so unworthy of you. It is like this watch, the very commonest, a slop-made watch! and this small cashmere, try it on, I pray you!"

She put it over her shoulders.

"Ah, me!" cried he," to put on a princess's shoulders a grisette's shawl! I would not have exposed them to the dangers of catching cold under a garment which scarcely covers them, nor would I have consented to the concealment of such a fine and elegant figure except under the finest fabrics!"

"With all that, monsieur," said Fleurette, impatient at these compliments," I remain with the shawl on my hands: what am I to do!"

"Keep it," he laughingly answered, "until we have discovered the one who sent it."

"And you are very sure, monsieur," she replied fastening upon him an attentive regard," that you did not?"

"To prove it," he said, making a gesture as if to throw it in the fire," I wish to burn it, so I may have the right to give you another."

"No, I do not wish it burned, but that it be returned to *him* to whom it belongs, and who well knows that I do not wish anything from him and that he can expect nothing from me."

These words were uttered in such a determined manner that Ludovic understood that there was nothing further to be done at least just then, and that it was necessary to temporize in order not to lose all.

"I understand that you do not want these presents, but

in order to return them to the simpleton who sent them it is first necessary to know him. I will do my utmost to find him."

"Good!" said Fleurette with satisfaction.

"And as soon as I am on his track, as soon as I have any suspicion, I will communicate with you."

"How?" said she quickly,

"I will come to your house and tell you."

He had hazarded this remark timidly and Fleurette without any distrust frankly responded:

"At mine! no, I am never there."

"Then come here, like to-day, as you pass in the morning."

"In the morning," said she, naively thinking over her morning's route," that will be difficult."

"Are you afraid of me?" asked Ludovic with a melancholy and becoming smile.

"Why should I be?" replied she, raising her head, with an astonishment far from flattering to the young man's self-esteem. "Whether I come or not you know that it is all the same."

"Then come," quickly responded Ludovic.

She looked around as if to assure herself that this luxury which had at first surprised and charmed her, had almost already lost its danger, and tranquilly replied;

"Why not? But you promise to inform me who has sent me these presents!"

"I do. And in return," said he, detaining the young girl who was rising to leave, "you will tell me why you do not love me."

"I will, if I discover the reason."

"There must be some reason," insisted he.

"There may be many," responded she, laughing," and I am in a hurry."

"But at least tell me one—only one!"

At that moment the groom entered with an unframed note, on satin paper, saying:

"From mademoiselle Delia!"

"Ah!" said Fleurette gaily, "you demand reasons, and perhaps here is one."

"It is true," said Ludovic blushing and trying to smile,

"I remember that *a propos* of this partnership passion—you have already counselled me to end it."

"For *your own sake*," cried she, "not for mine."

She hastened out of the boudoir, descended the private stairway, crossed the courtyard, and, in leaving the sumptuous hotel, encountered Etienne, who was going to his work by his usual route, that is to say the longest.

This was the first time they had met since the scene in which William had played the part of liberator.

Etienne, whose love rather than his vanity had been wounded, ashamed of his conduct, had told no one of the check he had received, and had sworn to not only forget Fleurette but to never speak to her again.

All at once perceiving her, brisk, smart and prettier than ever, he felt his love revive, and seeing her come out of a superb hotel at that hour the serpent of jealousy pierced his heart afresh.

He at first wished to pass without being seen, but he was unable to withdraw his eyes from her. He wished, at the least not to accost her, but he found himself *vis-à-vis* to Fleurette uncertain yet whether he would speak or not.

It was she who first broke the silence.

"Good-day, Etienne!" she said, without embarrassment and as if nothing had passed between them, "how are you?"

"Bad," responded the workman.

Then, no longer being able to contain the suffering which tortured him, he said in a suppressed voice:

"Where have you been?"

Fleurette regarded him with astonishment, and did not reply.

"Whence come you," he angrily repeated, "in this toilet, at this hour, and leaving this handsome house?"

"What do you mean?" slowly said Fleurette, "and what business is it of yours?"

"It concerns me," said he, beside himself, "it concerns me, because I love you." There were tears in his eyes while he spoke.

"You *love* me, and you beat me!"

"I beat you—*because* I loved you!"

This reason was not without some value in Fleurette's

eyes, as she had always liked her old comrade, in spite of his bad character.

"Listen," she said to him gently; "Once for all convince yourself that you have no rights over me, no account to demand of me, and that I am my own mistress. Are you thoroughly convinced of it?"

"Yes," said he, lowering his head.

"That being understood, I am pleased to inform you that I come from M. Ludovic Durussel's house because I had to speak to him there."

"Why?" said he turning pale.

"On my own business!"

"What? tell me!"

"I would, frankly, and as to a friend, were your lips not pale and trembling with anger; and I do not see what right you have to either get angry at, or to question me."

"That means," cried he," that you confess!"

"I confess nothing! but if he pleased me I would avow it! Meanwhile calm yourself, and we shall meet again when you become more reasonable."

She went rapidly off; leaving Etienne standing motionless before the hotel.

"Ah! this M. Ludovic," said he, shaking his fists in the air, "I will not lose sight of him!"

CHAPTER XVI.

The following Sunday Fleurette on making her morning visit to mademoiselle Justine found the latter extremely agitated.

"Heavens! what is the matter now?"

"Great affairs, my little dear."

"Affairs of State?" asked Fleurette, smiling.

"Precisely," answered the *femme de chambre* shaking her head with a serious air as if foreseeing great evils. "It is long since things went well. Oh! revolutions, revolutions.

I detest them! I believed that after that of Mexico we would have no more, and here is a new one."

"Truly?" cried Fleurette, curiously, "what is this?"

Justine lowered her voice, and replied:

"M. Ludovic Durussel has broken, positively broken, with mademoiselle Delia, my mistress; it was only yesterday that he declared himself, but I could see for some time that he was preparing the stroke for us. Whence is he going? I do not know, but this does not come from him. M. Ludovic is too undecided a character to ever take such a resolution of hif own accord."

Fleurette was somewhat moved on hearing these words. Yesterday she had again seen Ludovic, whose intentions had been much plainer and his compliments more pressing, but he had said nothing to her of his projects of abdication in regard to Delia. In this she saw a delicacy which flattered her, not that she wished to withdraw Ludovic from his one-third interest in Delia's heart, but for everybody, above all for a woman, there is, in the least domination exercised, a satisfaction of self-love which is almost sure to win her gratitude.

"My mistress," continued Justine," is vexed to the last degree."

"She loved him very much then?" said Fleurette.

"Not the least in the world, no more than the others. She is too honest to have any preference. But it is as annoying and embarrassing as an administration affair. M. Ludovic retires, and his two associates are not rich enough to keep up the establishment by themselves.

"I understand."

"And in case of failing to agree there would be a compulsory dissolution, a liquidation. Altogether it is a partnership the reconstruction of which very much alarms me—for my own particular interests."

"You, mademoiselle Justine?"

"I say like my mistress; one knows what one has, one does not know what one shall have! But," added she, carrying her hand to her forehead, as if to chase away the preoccupations of a woman of State," let us think only of pleasure, joy and Saint Cloud. You know that to-day is the *fete*?"

"No!"

"The weather is superb, and in order to distract herself a little my poor mistress, who is very sad, has gone out in the large carriage with two gentlemen, leaving us free for the whole evening. There is a ball at Saint Cloud; also there are illuminations in the park, there are the shops and the music; how can I tell all the different attractions? Larose has proposed to escort me, or I should have carried you with me, my little dear."

"Don't worry on my account, mademoiselle."

"You have somebody, then?" asked Justine with interest.

"Oh! gracious, no, but I will find some companion."

She thought of Michelette, who she knew was at that moment at home and alone. Michelette, animated by Fleurette's energy and sustained by her counsels, had, not without difficulty, succeeded in breaking off with Pierre. He had expected, as formerly, to soften the young girl by his prayers, or to frighten her by his menaces. She had resisted the former, and braved the latter.

All the money she earned was confided to Fleurette, an inexorable guardian; and the first time that Pierre wished to beat her she had the audacity not to let him, and cried out and defended the door of her garret against him. He braved her defence and returned; he found no one. Michelette had taken refuge with Fleurette, her friend and protectress, where Pierre did not dare to follow her, for she had threatened him that she would reveal his cowardly conduct to everyone.

Michelette, henceforth easy in her mind, had returned to her lodging some days, and was commencing to grow rather weary when she beheld Fleurette, who said to her gaily:

"It is a *fete* day! I am going to take you to Saint Cloud, so make yourself beautiful and we will start."

"And our escorts?"

"We will do without any; I will escort you, and give you a treat. You have worked so long, my poor Michelette, that now you must be amused, and to-day being Sunday we have not, thank heaven, to ask anyone's permission."

Michelette's toilet was soon finished, and the two young friends went out together arm in arm, laughing, chattering, speaking turn about, and frequently both at once.

The Saint Cloud railway took them in a few minutes, and at a moderate price, to the park entrance where they were amazed and charmed by the multitude of promenaders, the splendor of the shops and the noise of the music.

Their pretty shapes and genteel figures procured them compliments which they pretended not to hear but of which they lost not a word.

After an hour's promenade they sought a place to rest and turned into the principal walk, whence one could see the drive, where they found two vacant seats on one of the stone benches, free seats which they hastened to take possession of.

But on surveying the persons already seated around them they found to their great surprise that they were among old acquaintances; it was mademoiselle Charlotte and a party of girls from the Coquenard shop.

All fashionable Paris seemed to have given for that day the *rendezvous* at Saint Cloud.

The places on the terrace occupied by mademoiselle Charlotte and her companions were the best for examining closely the toilets of the beautiful ladies who promenaded on the principal walk, and for contemplating at a distance the numerous equipages which passed on the road, near the water, from Sevres to Saint Cloud, and one could also see the large ha-ha, which served to enclose the park on that side.

Our young workwomen were good judges of fine clothes; they saw them habitually, and those which at this moment were presented to their eyes attracted their attention less than the calèches, laudaus, clarences and tilburys which filed before them like a procession at Longchamps. Each of these rich and elegant carriages excited the praise or envy of the spectators.

"Oh! what a beautiful calèche," said one, "it is like a sofa. How easy it must ride!"

"Oh! the pretty little tilbury," said another, "one would be delightfully uncomfortable in it!"

"And this one, mesdemoiselles," cried Charlotte. "Oh! what a charming coupé! It must be one of Ehrler's."

"Not at all," responded the first, "it is one of Binder's; I can see that it is his make."

"Never mind who made it, it is ravishing."

"And this open landau," cried all in a chorus, it is undeniably the most beautiful; how suitable the carriage, horses and livery. It is admirable!"

"Ah!" said Charlotte, "if I ever had such a carriage I should die of joy on entering it."

"And I before entering it," said Pamela, a *petite blonde* seated beside Charlotte; "but I am not lucky enough for that."

"Ah!" cried another indignantly, "see mesdemoiselles; that delicious landau, with room for four, is occupied by a young man alone—all alone!"

"What selfishness!" said Charlotte.

At that moment the landau, the subject of so many observations and desires, defiled on the route, and an obstruction of carriages made it pause an instant at the other side of the ha-ha, almost in front of the family bench where ten or twelve of these young girls were seated conversing. The young man, perceiving them, bowed respectfully and in a very marked manner which it was impossible to mistake.

Charlotte uttered a surprised and pleased cry:

"Mesdemoiselles, he saluted me!"

"Not so," said Pamela, "he bowed to me."

"To me!" cried each of the others. "I am certain of it, his eyes met mine and stopped."

"It isn't true," repeated Charlotte, with such intrepid conviction that no one any longer disputed with her. "He saluted me, I leave it to Fleurette, who has not yet said anything."

"I believe, mesdemoiselles," said Fleurette, laughing, "that he was looking at us all, and saluted all at once."

This compromise which ought to have satisfied every one contented none, and the claims became more lively than ever.

"Arrange it to suit yourselves," cried Fleurette, "since you are so obstinate; I alone could put you right and tell you the truth, but I will not speak."

"Speak, speak!" they unanimously cried.

"You will abide by my decision?"

"Yes, yes!" shouted every voice.

"Eh! well, mesdemoiselles," coolly said Fleurette, "he saluted me."

Charlotte uttered a great shout of laughter, which was joined in by all her companions, and for a quarter of an hour they did not spare their railleries at Fleurette's intemperate boast, while she, without being in the least disconcerted, tranquilly repeated:

"As you please; each of you deserved to be admired; but he only looked at me."

"And what makes you think so?"

"I do not care to say."

The pleasantries redoubled, accompanied by the music.

All at once they heard, in the distance, the air of a polka announcing that the ball had commenced, and, arising, they all rushed in the direction of the music, forgetting everything but dancing and pleasure.

We will not attempt to describe the animation, noise and gaiety of these sylvan balls which simply reunite a Parisian population, a dancing and joyous one, composed of young men, careless of to-day, and young girls, fearless of to-morrow, who have often expended their entire fortunes on their toilets for this one night and, like the Greek sage, carry their all with them.

Mademoiselle Charlotte missed few polkas or waltzef, but Fleurette met with the greatest success. It is said with truth that "the difficulty is in the outset." As soon as the first *contre-danse* commenced every eye was turned towards her; all the dancers surrounded her and solicited her hand. They contended for it, and as it was soon perceived that she was there without an escort, without a master, she enjoyed all the advantages of youth and beauty joined to that of independence, advantages which reflected also upon Michelette; and she, who for so long a time had been unaccustomed to liberty, enthusiastically saluted its return. More than once had Fleurette whispered to her:

"I believe it will soon be time for the cars to start; let us go."

"No, no," responded Michelette, whose ordinarily pale cheeks were brilliant with color; "I am engaged for three waltzes yet, and, besides, the last train does not leave till ten."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. Let's ask some one. "Isn't it true, monsieur," she asked of her partner, "that the last train goes at ten o'clock?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," he replied, passing his arm around the young girl's figure and disappearing with her in the vortex of an irresistible waltz.

He told the truth. The last train always left at ten, but what he had not told, this "false and frivolous cavalier," as romance calls it, was that it was already ten o'clock, and the girls were dancing yet.

Eleven o'clock passed, and still they waltzed. The evening was beautiful, the stars brilliant in the heavens and the gas in the groves, and the orchestra sent forth harmonious sounds. But all at once the latter was hushed, the echoes became mute, the gas went out, the ball was over.

"Already!" cried the young girls. That was their first thought. The second: "What time is it?" And when they found it was long past eleven, that there was now no train to hope for, and that they were a league and a half from Paris, sorrow succeeded joy.

Some, more philosophical or less fatigued than the others, gaily suggested making the journey on foot, but the proposition was indifferently received and badly supported.

They moved along by the park railing on the large *Place de Saint Cloud*, between the *Legriel* and *Tete-Noire* hotels. There the coachmen and valets of fashionable people awaited their masters, and cabmen their customers. These were their last hope.

But, owing to the lateness of the hour and there being no competition, the public coachmen they hailed were all engaged, or demanded extravagant sums to ease their consciences in breaking engagements.

How they now regretted the ancient landaus of the republic, the modest one-horse chaise, which was always sure, except of arrival, and went at all hours and at all prices. Alas, the omnibus has eclipsed it, steam has dispersed the remnants, and our ungrateful generation has scarcely preserved the remembrance of it.

As if to plague the tearful young pilgrims many rich equipages were stationed at the door of the *Tete-Noire*.

while their owners seated within at the windows of the first floor salons, resplendent with light, partook of ices, punch or sherbet before returning to Paris.

As if by a fatality, there was the delicious landau which had excited so much praise; only the top had been raised as a provision against the night dews, and the landau had become a covered carriage.

The horses impatiently pawed the ground; the coachman on his seat and the groon stationed near the door awaited their master's coming.

Charlotte, taking the proprietor of the *Tete-Noire* to one side, demanded why Saint Cloud, an imperial city, was just then so deprived of vehicles that Parisians who honored them by coming to their balls were, after two or three hours dancing, obliged to return on foot.

"Permit me," replied the landlord whom mademoiselle Charlotte's tirade had at first stunned," permit!—we have the Sèvres boats."

"Boats!" cried all the young girls, grasping at this last sheet-anchor. "Let us go! tell us the way!"

"Along the river to Sèvres. You cannot lose your way. There you walk up the principal street to the old post-office."

"But that will take an hour!" angrily cried Charlotte.

"No, only three quarters, going at a good pace."

Their lamentations re-commenced; but willing or not they had to submit to their fate.

"Come, let us start," said Fleurette, taking Michelette's arm. Together they started to commence their journey, the rest of the caravan bringing up the rear, when a young man descended the grand stairway. At sight of him the groom at the door of the landau before the hotel ran towards his master with a light summer overcoat. It was the owner of the landau.

"Ah!" murmured Charlotte and Pamela sneeringly, "since Fleurette knows him, and pretends he bowed to her, here is an occasion to demand the use of his carriage of him."

"Eh, mon Dieu!" said the young man to the proprietor while his servant was helping him on with his overcoat, "all the world seems, just now, to have the *entree* of your hotel, and a very pretty world, too. Is it a ball?"

"No, sir, it is an *émeute;* a dozen young girls——"

"Who are charming," said the other, regarding them.

"Who ask how they are to return to Paris this evening, and I have told them that there was no other way than by the Sèvres boats, to which, unfortunately, they must go on foot."

The young man perceiving Fleurette, who, her arm passed through Michelette's, found herself with Charlotte and Pamela at the head of the procession, quickly inclined his head. All the young ladies courtesied in return, but what was the general stupefaction when they saw the unknow advance towards Fleurette.

Charlotte became red and pale in turns; but this was nothing yet, and she thought she would be actually ill from spite when the handsome young man, profoundly saluting the flower-girl, said to her with an air of gallantry and respect:

"Mademoiselle Fleurette, will you permit me to take you, as well as your companion, back to Paris?" and he saluted her and Michelette.

It was like a scene in a theatre. A murmur of surprise and envy came from the whole line. Fleurette, although modest in her triumph, could not help throwing an indirect glance at Charlotte; then, addressing Ludovic, for it was he, she said with a gracious smile:

"If my friend, mademoiselle Michelette, consents to accompany me I will have great pleasure, monsieur, in accepting the honor of your invitation."

Ludovic made a sign to Gabriel, his groom, who had already recognised the young girl, but who had not the habit of recognition except when his master permitted it. He now ran and openen the door, and lowered the steps. Ludovic helped Fleurette in; then Michelette sprang after her, and the door was quickly re-closed; but not before Charlotte, Pamela and the others had had time to see the two young girls luxuriously installed in the back seat of the landau.

The carriage disappeared while Charlotte and her companions were yet motionless before the entrance of the *Tête-Noire.* Michelette could scarcely breathe, from surprise and joy. As to Fleurette, although since her visit to

the Durussel mansion she was a little more accustomed to the manners of the great world, she could not help being astonished. Never before had she ridden in such a fine and handsome coach. Gold, ivory, glass and silk shone everywhere. Springs, easy and pliable, balanced it perfectly, like a palanquin, and intercepted the contact with the pavement and the jolting of the roads.

The sky was magnificent, the air warm, although refreshing and reviving through the rapidity of their speed; a brisk breeze blew on the foreheads and curls of the young girls, and Ludovic, seated in front, regarded Fleurette alone, and was only occupied with her.

His companions, recovered from their first astonishment, frankly gave themselves up to their joys, gossip and remembrances of the ball. The way appeared long to nobody, and before midnight they were in Paris.

Ludovic first conducted Michelette to her home.

"Now," said he to his coachman," to the *rue de Navarin*."

He found himself alone with Fleurette.

CHAPTER XVII.

At thus finding herself in a handsome landau, tête-à-tête with Ludovic, Fleurette felt neither distrust nor fear. All that had happened during the evening had appeared very natural to her, and if anything astonished her it was the sort of embarrasment which her companion seemed to experience.

Ludovic without examining his sentiments too closely commenced to love the young girl seriously. His love betrayed itself by this same timidity and if Fleurette had had more experience she would have easily perceived it.

"It is fortunate," she said, "that you should have accidentally been at Saint Cloud."

"I went there purposely."

"Ah, bah!" said Fleurette astonished, "how was that?"

"Madame Beaurin, with whom I passed the afternoon, told me of your projected expedition with mademoiselle Michelette to Saint Cloud."

"You talk of me with madame Beaurin, then?"

"Every day."

"She has never said anything to me about it, nor have you, and when I recall my first suspicions—" said she thoughtfully.

"Suspect whatever you will, Fleurette, I no longer possess the courage to have secrets from you.

He then confessed to her that the jewels, which were not worth the offering, came from him. He confessed that in order to continue to see her, and not to be sent away by her, he had not wished to make himself known. He finally confessed that he had given up Delia on her account and, henceforth free, he offered her, along with his affection, the sweetest and most agreeable existence, in fact all that love and wealth are able to give, in a city like Paris, to youth and beauty.

Stopping at last, he impatiently awaited a response, which he believed must surely be favorable.

Fleurette, after a few moments silence, said slowly:

"I have listened well to what you have said, Monsieur; it has astonished and interested me very much."

"Is it true then, "cried he joyfully, "that you accept?"

"No," said she calmly, like one who reflects.

"Ah! you have a hard and insensible heart which will never feel anything," cried Ludovic, beside himself.

"You deceive yourself: what you have done for me has touched me; I already knew of your separation with mademoiselle Delia."

"And you said nothing!—are you not somewhat grateful?"

"Yes, indeed! but not enough so for what you ask me."

"What!" replied he angrily, "all this luxury and opulence with which I wish to surround you cannot please or charm you?"

"Oh, yes!" she frankly answered, "I have more than once dreamt of the magnificence that I was perhaps wrong in admiring so much at your house. This beautiful carriage

in which we are so comfortably seated pleases me greatly, and I should much like to keep it."

"Speak, it is yours!" cried the young man, pressing her in his arms.

"Yes, yes," said she smiling, "I understand very well at what price you offer me all this; but you will find me very vain; beautiful and rich as all these things are it seems to me that in such a bargain I shall give the most!"

"Undoubtedly!" cried Ludovic, lovingly, "and to my eyes your love is priceless."

"For that reason," said she sadly," it should not be bought. I have had an idea, for some days, such as I never had before, and which to you and those around me will appear very absurd."

"What?"

"It is to belong only to the one whom I shall love.

"Ah! if I could only be the one."

"I do not prevent you from trying."

"But if you do not love me, if you *never* love me!"

"Why not? The first time I saw you I found you very unpleasant. It is true that you then thought my hands were dirty." She coquettishly glanced at her hands, and continued: "You see that anyone may be deceived; to commence with, myself; for in fact, you are not any wickeder than another, you are even better than the majority," and she looked kindly at him.

"Ah!" cried he joyfully, "you see, it will come, it has already; you love me, you love me!"

"No," said she kindly and regretfully.

There was doubtless a consolation or a hope in the inflection of her voice which reanimated Ludovic's courage, for he redoubled his efforts, and, to decide the affair, employed all the tenderest and most persuasive means which his passion was able to inspire him with. I do not say that he would have succeeded, nor that he had gained his cause; but it was evident that Fleurette, generally so insensible, felt, while listening to him, an emotion, or at least a sentiment, of pity before unknown to her.

"Hush!" she said, at last." We have arrived at my house."

The carriage was actually in front of madame Beaurin's.

The groom had knocked, the door had opened, and he had returned to the carriage-door, but Fleurette did not get out. Ludovic had detained her.

"You will not quit me thus, and without promising to see me again: do not refuse me. Listen!" said he quickly. "Wednesday evening, next Wednesday, my mother goes to the country. I will be alone, alone in that immense house. You know that you can fearlessly come there without any danger, you know it!"

"Certainly," said Fleurette, seeking to get away.

"Then you will come, will you not?"

"Possibly, I do not say no."

"Then I shall expect you."

"I do not say yes! I will see; but let me—"

Ludovic released her hand, and Fleurette jumped out of the landau. The door, in closing itself, let her see Etienne, who, screened and concealed by the carriage door, had heard the end of the conversation.

"I know all," he said in a sombre and concentrated voice. "But I will prevent your being his."

"You!" cried Fleurette angrily, "*you* spy on me, and speak to me like that!"

She turned quickly to the carriage, which was about leaving, and while the groom was remounting to his seat she cried through the door to Ludovic:

"I say yes! I consent!"

The landau was gone; Fleurette ran through the carriage entrance, which was open, and which she closed in Etienne's face, rendering him furious and desperate.

That day, unfortunately for himself, Etienne had consented, in order to divert his thoughts, to pass the evening at the barrier. He had remained late, very late, in a Batignolles *cabaret*. He played, drank with the workmen, and told them his troubles with Fleurette.

Wine renders one expansive and tender. His friends had interested themselves in his difficulties, and, the wine helping, had excited him and demonstrated that he had no spirit if Fleurette did not end by becoming his mistress. The hour for closing arrived, and each started for his home. Etienne said good-night to his friends, and went staggering away to the conquest of Fleurette. Meanwhile, little by

little, his spirits became calmer, the fumes of the wine subsided, and he was almost sober, or rather he was only slightly tipsy, when he arrived in the *rue de Navarin*.

It was then midnight. He reflected that the whole neighborhood, including Fleurette, was abed, and that he had better quietly return home; a resolution he was about to keep, when, at that very moment, there arose in the *rue de Navarin* the noise of a carriage, an elegant landau with two horses, a coachman, and a groom; and this landau stopped directly in front of Fleurette's door.

The carriage windows were open: he drew near and, to his great surprise, heard a voice which was but too well known to him. She whom he had so loved, whom he still loved, in a superb equipage, at such an hour, tête à tête with some rich lord, doubtless that M. Ludovie, of whom she had already spoken to him, and who at this very moment supplicated her to accord him a *rendez-vous* for the following Wednesday, which the coquette did not refuse, or refused very feebly!

He was no longer master of himself, he rushed towards her; and we have seen how disastrous both to himself and to Fleurette was his inopportune intervention.

Ashamed at finding herself thus watched, and surprised, humiliated that anyone should think he had the right to order her, she had only obeyed the first impulse of pride and anger; she had promised, she was engaged.

As to Etienne, he had returned home furious and did not sleep all night; but, after having repeated that Fleurette was a girl unworthy of him, after having sworn to forget her, never more to speak to her, and not even to pronounce her name, he had arisen, gone to Charlotte and related all to her; last night's scene, Fleurette's new intrigue and the *rendez-vous* for the approaching Wednesday night at M. Ludovic's house, during his mother's absence.

And Charlotte, indignant, had exclaimed:

"What immorality! A young girl that we admitted to our society, and of whom I made a friend! I have but one piece of advice to give you, Etienne; It is to do like I shall, never see her again."

"I am decided upon that," cried Etienne, "and will never think of her again."

But he thought of her every day. It was useless to try and drive away recollection by working from morning till night. The idea of Fleurette arriving at that *rendez-vous* exasperated him and rendered him crazy. During the first three days of the week he did not leave the shop, he had promised himself not to go out; but on Wednesday evening, without understanding how it came about, without being able to explain it to himself, he found himself in the street where Ludovic lived, promenading before his house, and at dark, awaiting—whom? he dared not acknowledge it to himself. What was his design? To reproach her with her perfidy overwhelm her with reproaches, and then—and then *to kill her.*

The delirium which had mounted to his brain dissipated itself for an instant. He was ashamed of himself and his project. For fear of again yielding to the latter he abandoned the place, he fled: but he had scarcely got to the end of the street when jealousy made him retrace his steps.

While he had been away perhaps she had arrived without his having been there to stop her! Perhaps she was at this very moment with M. Ludovic—. He sprang forward, he ran himself out of breath, and at the same moment that he perceived, from a distance, the door of the mansion—a young girl entered it.

He knocked at the door; he desired to speak with M. Ludovic; they said he was not at home, that he was in the country with madame, his mother. He wished to see the young girl who had just entered the house; they replied that nobody had entered. Furious, he wanted to remain inside; three or four large lackeys put him out and threatened him with the police; and poor Etienne fell before the door exhausted from fatigue and rage. Fleurette was forever lost to him.

The morning after the *fete*, that evening signalized by so many events, Michelette, before going to work, had run around to the *rue de Navarin* to talk over with her friend their successes of last night.

She expected to find Fleurette radiant. She found her sad, and, what had never before been the case with the flower-girl, depressed and discouraged. She questioned her, and Fleurette, ordinarily so frank and unreserved, remained

silent. She felt an invincible repugnance to speaking of what had happened, of Ludovic's entreaties, of the involuntary and imprudent promise which she had made, of her present regrets, and of the false and embarrassing position in which she found herself,—"and besides," she said to herself, looking at Michelette, "what's the use in telling her all that, she wouldn't understand me." She was right; Michelette would have seen nothing in it but a most auspicious event, a glorious one for her friend, and, as she was the kindest girl in the world, she would have sincerely rejoiced, and would never have supposed that anyone could find in so unhoped for a fortune a subject of chagrin or regret.

Fleurette was not of the same opinion. She felt that she was foolishly engaged to a young man; one who really loved her, who had behaved well towards her, and with whom, after all, she had no right to trifle. It is true that she did not love him, but she was not in love with anyone else. She even liked him better than others; Etienne, for example, Ludovic, at least, would not beat her.

She passed the whole of Monday morning in great perplexity, and without coming to any determination. Tuesday was yet more terrible, for it was the next day that Ludovic expected her; and even admitting that she was determined to break her word, how could she inform him of it, how explain her reasons to him? We have said that Fleurette could not write, and to go in person to tell Ludvoic that she would not meet him was a resolution as absurd as dangerous. Tuesday gradually glided away without her having taken any resolution. Wednesday came; fatal day! she cauld no longer escape from her destiny. It was too late now for her to retract or withdraw. Uncertain, discouraged, and forgetting her ordinary energy, she bowed her head and gave herself up to despair. This time it was all over with poor Fleurette!

She went out, and slowly descended the *rue des Martyrs*. She, who was ordinarily so gay, so lively, was now sad and discontented with herself, and no longer had heart for anything; she remained insensible to the beautiful morning, which was just commencing, and to the joyous sun who had already inundated her with his rays.

Arrested by a stoppage of carriages she mounted the steps of the church, *Notre-Dame de Lorette*, and paused an instant.

The idea of prayer, the idea of a God whom she did not know, never entered her head, and yet, as if in our egotistical nature pain more than joy reveals to us the existence of the Divinity, she felt a vague desire to address herself to a superior Being, to confide her sufferings to Him, and to ask aid and consolation of Him.

At that moment an old fashioned carriage stopped at the foot of the steps, and there descended from it a great lady with an angular form, dressed in black, and with a noble, dignified and stern air. Her presence spread coldness and respect about her. Behind her advanced a young girl with a nimble step and a majestic figure. Nothing could be simpler or more elegant than her dress; nothing more gracious nor more distinguished than her manners, altogether it was an exhibition of youth and beauty, of such pure and perfect features, that the few persons descending the church steps stopped to regard her, and murmured in low tones: "how beautiful she is!"

Her noble old companion made a false step; she hastened forward to assist her, reassured her, and forced her to lean on her arm; and all this with such goodwill and kindness, and a smile so angelic that those who had already admired her beauty said to themselves with emotion, almost with affection; "How charming she is!'

While these two ladies were slowly mounting the church steps Fleurette had suddenly turned pale; her lips trembled, her heart beat rapidly, and her legs bent so beneath her that she was obliged to support herself against one of the columns.

The aged lady and the young girl passed by her and entered the church. Then Fleurette, coming to herself and collecting all her strength, rushed after them, crying to herself:

"Ah! my god-mother!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was early. There was scarcely anyone in the church yet. Fleurette had no difficulty in finding Clotilde, which was her god-mother's name; she had repeated it too many times to forget it.

The two ladies were conversing with a white-haired priest who directed them towards a confessional in one of the chapels on the lower side. The old lady followed him and the young one, remaining where she was, knelt in prayer.

Fleurette, trembling and frightened at the silence of the church, softly advanced, fearing to disturb her god-mother's meditations by the noise of her footsteps. Arriving near her she tried to speak, but expression failed her. She fell on her knees and seized Clotilde's hand, which she covered with kisses and tears.

"What do you wish? Who are you?" cried the young lady, astonished.

"Who am I? A poor girl who owes you everything and who has never forgotten it; Fleurette, the flower girl—Fleurette, my god-mother, whom you named—and your gold—that gold piece which I have carefully preserved for almost four years. Ah! merciful Father!" said she sadly, you no longer remember me."

"Yes—yes, my child," said the young lady in an agitated voice: "but speak lower—and first rise; one should only kneel to God. Seat yourself there, near me."

Obedient to her order Fleurette seated herself beside her god-mother, whose hand she had not released.

"I see you then at last!" said Fleurette, regarding her with admiration mingled with respect, "At last it is you, you have heard me! I have appealed to you so many times and have waited so long for you—my god-mother, my god-mother, may you be blessed!"

There was such an effusion of tenderness and gratitude in her eyes, in her voice and in the expression of her fea-

tures; this gratitude was so real and true, that it was impossible not to believe in it, and Clotilde felt touched to the depths of her heart.

"I owe my life and my fortune to you god-mother."

"You are very rich, then?" said Clotilde smiling.

"Oh, yes! Very rich, and very unhappy! No," said she repressing herself—"very happy, for you are here, god-mother, you are here in Paris!"

"Until to-morrow."

Fleurette uttered a cry of regret and sorrow.

"Yes," continued Clotilde, with Madame de Kéroualle, my cousin, who, being ill, has come to consult a celebrated physician, and we came to confession together, this morning. And you, also, I suppose?" she added, looking at Fleurette.

"I!" naively said Fleurette, "never!"

"Never?" said Clotilde astonished.

"I do not even know what it is, god-mother."

"And who has brought you up, my child?"

"No one but myself."

"And how have you lived?"

"As I could."

"And have you never," said Clotilde showing her an image of Christ placed in front of them, "thought of praying to God?"

"I have never prayed except to you, god-mother, and you did not reply to me. But I am the better for it to-day, it has done that for me. Now you are here, you come to my aid, I am saved!"

"Yes, yes, my child," cried Clotilde, in accents which came from the heart, and which must have been heard by the Eternal. "Yes, it is not undesignedly that God has put you in my way. I will protect you, I will save you! The name of 'god-mother' which you have given me I accept before God, and I will perform the duties of one."

And Clotilde, herself a poor girl without a friend or protector, swore in a low voice to safely guard this other young girl, more miserable than herself, whom God had sent to her. On her part Fleurette swore to live only for her benefactress. Their two oaths arose to heaven where the angels received them.

"Now speak quickly," said Clotilde, looking towards

the confessional where her cousin was, "I have only a few minutes to give you."

Then Fleurette related in a low voice and with few words her whole life up to that day, a recital which Clotilde often had difficulty in understanding and which frequently made her blush. More than once the young lady put her hand over the other's mouth, and said:

"Hush, hush!"

"Why?" ingenuously asked Fleurette, who in this recital would only have blamed herself if she had concealed the truth and had not told her god-mother all. And Clotilde, comprehending that her innocence was even her justification, and that her ignorance must be blamed and not her heart, recovered herself and said kindly:

"Nothing, nothing; go on, my child."

But when Fleurette came to her meetings with M. Ludovic Durussel, to the promise she had given him, to her hesitation, regrets and remorse, and to the impossibility of breaking such an engagement, Clotilde indignantly burst forth.

"When one engages one's self to commit a bad action," cried she, "perjury becomes a virtue!"

"What do you say, god-mother?" asked Fleurette, astonished.

"I haven't the time to discuss it with you here, but listen well to what I am going to say. Honor ought to be the first law with us young girls; for it we ought to sacrifice all, even life. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, god-mother," said Fleurette energetically.

"Well then, you will not go to M. Ludovic's this evening. I forbid it."

"Yes, god-mother," said Fleurette with such spirit that Clotilde comprehended that here was an iron will which nothing could break.

"Well, my god-daughter," said Clotilde, regarding her kindly, "you are good-hearted, you will be an honest girl."

"I will be whatever you make me, god-mother, whatever you shall order me to be."

"Here comes my cousin from confession," said Clotilde quickly, "leave me!"

"And you leave to-morrow, and I shall not see you again!" cried Fleurette in despair.

"Oh, no, I do not thus abandon the soul which is given and confided to me. Come to-day, at four o'clock, to the Kéroualle mansion, *rue de Varennes*."

"Very well, god-mother."

"I will occupy myself with you, and will talk with you. Just now you asked me what was confession. You have made yours to me."

"And since you said to me: 'well, my god-daughter,' I feel changed, I was discouraged, but am no longer so; I was without hope, but now I am not."

"Well!" said Clotilde with a sad smile, "leave me, in my turn, to ask from God that which I have given you; strength and courage." And she went towards the confessional.

Fleurette walked slowly from the church, constantly turning her head to get yet one more glimpse of her god-mother.

The last words she had heard had somewhat decreased her joy. So her god-mother also suffered, was unhappy. Her troubles, which she did not yet know, were already her own; she no longer thought of herself, but of her god-mother.

In order to keep the promise she had made, she resolved in the first place to put in a single package the watch, chain, brooch and shawl she had received from Ludovic. She did not yet see how she was to return them to him nor how she was to make him acquainted with the unexpected change in her resolutions, but she had the whole day before her in which to find a way.

The moment she returned madame Beaurin hastened joyously to meet her. A chest had arrived for her, a precious one without doubt.

"Ah!" said Fleurette to herself, with a feeling of pain, "a new present from Ludovic; I will not receive it."

Then she thought that here might be the way she had sought of returning to him his other presents.

"Is the person here who brought this chest?" she asked.

"Yes, my dear child."

"It is M. Ludovic's servant, doubtless?"

"No, my child; it is an employé of the Strasbourg railway, who is waiting for you to get you to write in the margin, as he says—that is to say, to sign."

"Monsieur, I do not know how to write," said Fleurette.

"That's all right, mademoiselle," said the man," You can make your mark."

"And the expressage?"

"Is paid; it is addressed to you free from Switzerland."

"From Switzerland!" thought Fleurette," Oh beyond a doubt it is from William, my friend William. All my friends have arranged to came to my aid to-day."

It was a small and light wooden chest: she carried it off, rapidly mounted the stairs, entered her room closed the door and, her heart beating with emotion, hastened to open the little chest.

On top, inside, was a letter.

"Ah! what a nuisance not to know how to read!" said she.

No matter, she preferred to wait rather than to confide the contents, whatever they were, to madame Beaurin; and she went on examining the interior of the box.

All it contained was a magnificent cluster of blood red flowers, something like the blossom of the pomegranate; the leaves were of a persistent and perennial green; for after their long journey they looked as fresh as if they had just been gathered.

The sight of this handsome bouquet produced a singular effect upon Fleurette. She had never seen in Paris any flowers like these, they were completely unknown there, and yet they awakened in her an indescribable sensation which seemed like recollection. It seemed, as she looked at and touched them, as if she heard the north wind blow and as if it was very cold. Memory returned to her at last, and she cried, in a joyous voice:

"Yes, yes, the 'Star of the Alps,' those red flowers which, in my infancy, I ran and gathered on the snow."

She had frequently talked of them with William and immediately on his return to the mountains he had sent her this souvenir of her Fatherland. The presence of these flowers, a new proof of William's friendship, and the position she found herself placed in just then threw her into a pro-

found and deep revery. Not that she hesitated as to what she should do; she had promised her god-mother not to see Ludovic; that was settled. But how, without seeing him and without writing to him, could she make him acquainted with the sudden change in her plans? It was impossible. On the other hand she felt that not to forewarn him, to leave him all the evening hopeful, expectant and uneasy, was wrong—nevertheless it must be done.

During these reflections the time slipped away. It was a long distance from the *rue de Navarin* to the *rue de Varennes*, and she feared being late at the *rendez-vous* given by her god-mother; so she hastened to go out, and walked rapidly, but it seemed as if she could never get there in time on foot. An omnibus was passing; she entered it and took a seat at the far end of the long vehicle, where she would be the least disturbed and could meditate at her ease. Once installed in her place she raised her eyes and glanced at her neighbor: it was her great friend mademoiselle Charlotte.

"Ah! how smart and cheerful you look!" cried the latter, "You are beautiful, Fleurette, which doesn't astonish me much. It is a day of conquest!"

"What do you mean?" demanded Fleurette.

"Oh! now that you are a great lady, I suppose you no longer wish to recognize your former friends."

"I, a great lady?" and she shrugged her shoulders.

"*Mon dieu*! yes. I know all!"

She then related to Fleurette, enviously and maliciously, all that Etienne, in his spite, had confided to her: the landau scene and Ludovic's propositions.

"That is all true," coldy said Fleurette.

"I understand now," continued Charlotte, "from Etienne's anger, that nothing has really passed between you and him. I also said to myself: 'Fleurette is too proud and too sharp not to have chosen better; and I see it is true by the promise you have made to M. Ludovic: to go to his house this very day, at dusk, while his mother is absent."

"All very true," said Fleurette smiling, "but it will not happen, nevertheless."

"What! would you try to make me believe that one would disdain or refuse such a chance!"

"Certainly!—and I will prove it to you, if you wish."

"How?" said Charlotte with eager curiosity.

Fleurette regarded her closely and said slowly:

"Would you like, Charlotte, to go in my place this evening to M. Ludovic's?"

Charlotte believed her companion was mocking her. and indignantly cried:

"I! And under what pretext, for what reason?"

"To render me a service, one of friendship."

"What is it?"

"To tell him that I am not ungrateful, that I do not despise his affection, but that it is impossible for me to return it; that I ask his pardon for breaking my word, but that I am unable to come to his house this evening."

"Truly!" cried Charlotte, upon whom Fleurette's coldness commenced to make an impression, "and for what reasons."

"You could not understand them."

"Perhaps not; but he?"

"Eh, well! you may tell him—that some one he knows, my god-mother, has forbidden it."

"That is no reason."

"It is a sufficient one for me.—And then," said Fleurette, drawing a package from her pocket, "you will return him these jewels and this shawl which I can no longer in justice keep."

"I understand," said Charlotte, with a preoccupied air, taking the package.

"Now then," continued Fleurette," you promise me that my commission shall be executed this evening, and that this package shall be delivered to him?"

"I promise," slowly responded Charlotte, under the influence of an idea which just then absorbed her, "you are a droll girl," she murmured, "but you are a good child, after all.'

"And you, also, Charlotte; I am sure that now you are sorry for having misjudged me and that henceforth you will do me justice."

"Certainly," said Charlotte firmly and like one whose resolution is taken. "Count on me for that."

She made a signal to the conductor to stop the omnibus. Then she got out, and Fleurette continued on her way.

Charlotte promptly executed the shop business which had brought her to this quarter. It seemed to her that such a bold stroke, a chance for fortune, offered itself as occurs only once in a life time, and that she must know how to profit by it. She returned home, made her toilet, in which the most studied simplicity was united to the most seductive coquetry, and, when her mirror had told her that she was as beautiful as possible, she covered herself with a mantle and went out.

At nine that evening she knocked at the doors of the Durussel mansion; she asked for M. Ludovic, and, by the direction of the concierge, traversed the court, mounted a private stairway and passed through a mysterious door which was opened by a handsome young man who had waited since one o'clock, his heart beating with love and hope.

"Fleurette!" he cried with transport, and advancing towards her.

"You must no longer think of her," responded Charlotte coldly; "she abandons you forever, and has charged me with the return of these tokens of love which you have thrown away upon her."

It is impossible to describe the surprise, grief and anger which in turn succeeded one another on Ludovic's distracted features. Thunderstruck, he fell into a chair; before him stood the young messenger holding the fatal package towards him.

Charlotte's mantle had fallen to her feet and left visible a figure, young, slender and rich; the warmth of the temperature allowed of her shoulders being slightly uncovered. The arm she extended towards Ludovic was superb, she seemed to be so touched at his grief, and she contemplated him with such beautiful and compassionating eyes that he could not refain from remarking that tears, or rather pearls, abounded in them.

She wished to withdraw. He opposed it. It was very simple, he must know all the details of this treachery, which she did not extenuate; far from it.

One does not know how far the emotion which follows great griefs may go, nor where ideas of revenge may conduct.

Perhaps Charlotte had counted upon this.

CHAPTER XIX.

The next day a most remarkable fact was the subject of conversation in the *rue Neuve-Coguenard.*

Mademoiselle Charlotte had appeared at the shop wearing a gold watch and a turquoise ring and jewelry; but what more than paid for this magnificence, and was greatly to her disadvantage besides, was that one of her beautiful eyes was horribly swollen, and was almost invisible, enclosed as it was, within a voilet circle; and an enormous bump protruded from her pretty forehead; and her nose, chief sufferer, had been outrageously beaten and bruised.

What was the cause, who the author, of this drama? One was lost in suppositions and conjectures; the truth was never wholly explained.

A rumor, doubtless false, circulated nevertheless that Charlotte in coming out of an elegant mansion where she had spent the evening, at a rather late hour, had been assaulted by a madman who apparently wished to kill her; a furious lover who had mistaken her for his unfaithful sweetheart, and who had not found out the mistake until it was too late to stop the effects or to efface the traces.

In the meanwhile Fleurette, whom we left in the omnibus, arrived in the *rue de Varennes*: a maid servent, who evidently expected her, conducted her to the very modest chamber, a sort of cell, which Clotilde occupied in the mansion of her proud and noble cousin, madame la marquise de Kéroualle.

Fleurette contemplated, with emotion and respect, that room, wherein everything breathed order, simplicity, piety and studiousness.

The Christ in ivory, placed in the centre of her godmother's alcove, the tapestry frame, the crayons, the piano and the books were all things the use of which she was almost ignorant of. She was looking at them when Clotilde entered. She wished to throw herself at the feet of her godmother, but the latter tenderly embraced her, saying:

"Come, my poor forsaken child, you have related all your faults to me—"

"And you no longer love me?—"

"I love and esteem you; for, where others would have succumbed, you have valiantly defended yourself and have come out victorous. Among us, who have never had such a battle, who would dare to throw the first stone at you? Place yourself there, my child, my sister," said Clotilde, making Fleurette sit beside her, "and tell me what you have done since morning."

"I have returned to M. Ludovic, by one of my friends, all of his presents, and have sent him word that he must not expect me to-night nor any other time."

"That is right. Now, listen to me. It is from ignorance alone that you have been on the point of falling. You must no longer be so exposed. I leave to-morrow, unhappily, for Brittany with my cousin. Here is a letter from me which you will carry to a worthy woman, superior of a convent."

Fleurette made a movement of fright.

"That word should not frighten you, my god-daughter; they cannot keep you there as a prisoner."

"That is fortunate, god-mother; for being accustomed to air and liberty I should die if deprived of them."

"I can readily believe so," said Clotilde, smiling, "but reassure yourself, you will only have to go there one or two hours every day, and they will teach you to read and write."

"I shall never learn, godmother; it will take too long and will be too difficult."

"Still that is the only way," responded Clotilde kindly, in which, in spite of absence, we can continue to speak to each other and always be together."

"Ah!" cried Fleurette quickly, "then I will soon know how; if I have to employ all my days and nights!"

Clotilde took her hand, and said:

"That is right. But that is'nt all yet."

"Whatever you wish; order me to do it," said Fleurette, pressing her god-mother's hand to her lips and on her heart.

"You have thus far lived like a heathen, like a bohemian."

"Are you sure?" asked she naively,

"Having no religion—"

"But you, god-mother."

"And not believing in anything—"

"Except you, godmother."

"That is not enough," said Clotilde, laughing in spite of herself, and covering the other's mouth with her hand. "You must instruct yourself like a christian."

"You believe?—"

"That in order to do so you should attend the necessary lessons, and first of all learn your catechism."

"Oh!" cried Fleurette, with a terrified air.

"It is necessary, I wish it," responded Clotilde firmly.

"Then it shall be done, I agree to it," cried Fleurette, like a person who takes a desperate determination, "for you, god-mother, I can do anything."

"Very well," said Clotilde, satisfied.

"And now, god-mother, when will you return to Paris?"

"I do not know," sadly responded the young lady.

"In order to witness my progress, and judge of your work?"

Clotilde made no answer, but a tear rolled down her cheek.

"God-mother, god-mother!" cried Fleurette, throwing herself on her knees, "I am a nobody compared with you, but if you attach any value to devotion and affection—"

"Ah!" murmured Clotilde sadly, "my life is lacking in that, I am alone in the world."

"No longer, godmother; there is one who henceforth will only live for you. It is I. See me, here. What do *you* think? It seems to me that misfortune with you would be sweeter than happiness by myself."

Before this cry from the heart, this outbreak of tenderness, there was no longer rank nor distance, and the noble young lady found herself, almost without wishing it, confiding her griefs to a heart which so well understood them.

The world is unsuspecting of deep miseries; miseries all the crueller that rank, position and education appear to render them neither possible nor probable. In such high society, such blazoned and gilded *salons*, one has not the right to appear unhappy; one is barely allowed to exist.

Clotilde's was a case in point.

Abroad, an object of homage, which her beauty attracted; in private exposed to every humiliation; a queen in the world, a slave at home; educated under the harsh rule of her cousin, madame la marquise de Kéroualle, Clotilde concealed from the eyes of all the kind of servitude in which she lived, a servitude which they would have been very much astonished had she not appeared grateful for.

The comte de Kéroualle, Clotilde's father, we have said before, died ruined. His entire family, at his death, consisted of a son, Jean de Kéroualle, a rather worthless fellow, who was partly the cause of his father's ruin. In order to repair his fortunes Jean de Kéroualle launched himself, as an adventurer, in hazardous and distant expeditions, and had found not fortune but death.

Clotilde was born after he had left home and found herself, when she lost her father, alone at five years of age with an old aunt who had raised her and who loved her tenderly. But this aunt, mademoiselle Beatrix de Kéroualle, had for her whole fortune six hundred livres income, upon which it was impossible for her and her niece to live and also provide for the expenses of the latter's education. It then became necessary, to her great regret, to accept the generous offers of the marquis de Kéroualle, chief of the elder branch, who proposed to take his little cousin into his family. But he burdened himself with his young relative only, and poor aunt Beatrix, forced to separate from her cherished infant, found in the environs of Nancy a religious community who, in consideration of her six hundred livres income, took her as a pensioner.

Scarcely once a year could the aunt, in order to see her niece, find the means to make a journey from Nancy to Paris or Brittany, but they wrote to each other at least once a week.

To the one, old and sick, it was a proper attention; to the other, young and already unhappy, a consolation; and their letters were the only remedy for the sufferings of the one and the sorrows of the other.

Surrounded as she was by egotistical and envious hearts, who detested her, *en famille*, and who considered her charms and successes as more than mortal injuries, Clotilde, good,

generous and expansive, was obliged to restrain all the noble enthusiasm, and generous sentiments which she had wished to bestow around her. Even her successes, far from making her vain, had often deeply afflicted and humiliated her.

Many a young man of the world, attracted by her rare beauty, had frequently been prodigal of ostentatious attentions, which, upon learning that she was portionless, he would hasten to withdraw.

Her pride, also, often rebelled against the eulogies with which she was overwhelmed, and in order to diminish the number or the exaggerations of her adorers she herself, with a gay smile, would hasten to throw out in advance some general phrases which warned them of danger, some indirect allusion to her poverty, a means which seldom failed of proving effectual.

To many the manner in which a service is rendered them more or less frees them from gratitude. Clotilde was not one of these. She had never forgotten that the marquis de Kéroualle, and after him his widow, had offered an asylum and protection to her childhood. Neither coldness, want of regard, nor even the reproach of benefits conferred (the worst of all outrages) could, in her eyes, justify ingratitude.

Only one compensation for her griefs had for some time past offered itself to her; it was the possibility of indirectly acquitting herself of services which had until then been rendered to her.

The marquis de Kéroualle, as we have said, had three daughters.

Elodie, the eldest, who was married, had had, if not much education, at least many masters, of every description. An education almost useless, which still had not been altogether lost. One person had profited by it; Clotilde, who had studied with a zeal and ardor beyond her years.

She went less into the world than her cousins, or rather, she scarcely went out at all, and the time passed at home was consecrated to a work which had become a consolation. She made rapid and astonishing progress, which no one noticed, and on which no one had ever complimented her.

After Elodie's marriage, whom it had been necessary to portion, madame la marquise did not conceal her intention

of still further increasing, if possible, the economy which already prevailed in her household. Clotilde boldly proposed that she should replace with her young cousins their former teachers of the piano, design, history, English, Italian, etc. etc., functions which to the general surprise, she discharged marvellously, and which saved the marquise over two thousand francs a year.

Thus Clotilde, who was already the companion and almost the servant of the marquise, found herself the instructress of the two daughters who, in place of loving her, from that day detested her both as cousin and governess.

One cannot doubt but that this recital, or rather these confidences, had been frequently interrupted by Fleurette's exclamations; but here her indignation no longer knew any bounds.

"You, god-mother, who deserve such respect and adoration, to live thus, in a state of slavery! while I, poor girl, am happier than you; I am free!"

"It is true! But re-assure yourself; this will not last."

"You have a plan?" said Fleurette quickly.

"Yes, when my task ends, when my cousins marry."

"That will be never!—what have they to induce anyone to marry them?"

"Their dowry! Then, when my debt is paid, when I shall have at least made every effort to acquit it, this is the design that I long ago formed with my aunt Beatrix."

Fleurette's attention redoubled.

"There is in Brittany, where I was born and have nearly always lived, a place named Saint Gildas, situated on the sea-shore, amid rocks, and which commands a view of the ocean. There one can breathe a pure and free air. There is a pious sisterhood there, consecrated to educating children and assisting the aged. I inherited from my mother some laces and a ring which I have carefully preserved. These, they say, are worth a thousand crowns. For this sum the sisters of Saint Gildas will consent to receive me among them."

"You, a nun!"

"With my aunt Beatrix whom they will permit to accompany me."

"You, a nun!" repeated Fleurette, grieved.

Yes," responded Clotilde with exaltation, "I will enter into religion; but a religion active and useful; which does not content itself simply, with praying, but which acts; which serves God by succoring fellow-creatures; which occupies itself with the past and the future, old age and childhood, which holds forth a hand to the tottering old man and to the young girl, like you, in danger of falling. Ah! this will be a beautiful and noble task!"

"But after all," cried Fleurette, distressed, "it would be a convent. Let's see, god-mother, do you detest the world then?"

"Not at all," said Clotilde smilingly, "and this world which is just commencing for me, offers me, in the spring-time of life, many hopes and charms. How many dreams have I already deluded myself with! what joys have intoxicated me with their illusions! how many duties, even, for which my heart seemed created, which become pleasures! A household to care for, a husband to love, and children to bring up, children who would lavish their caresses upon me. Ah! it is not without regret that one renounces such delights, and even such dreams! But, my child, when reason speaks it is necessary to submit one's self, when duty commands one must obey."

"And to renounce all that," cried Fleurette angrily, "for want of a dowry! want of money! when all the world around you gains it. Why godmother, have all the men this privilege?"

"Why?" said Clotilde, raising her head, "it would take too long to explain it to you."

"Is it that we women haven't as much spirit and intelligence as the men? How many times already, in my flower-girl's life as short as it has been, it has seemed to me that they were not really so strong and clever! Do you see, god-mother, they cannot deprive me of the idea I have here," and she tapped her forehead, full of intelligence, *finesse*, combinations and activity, "of making a fortune—and, I say, a good fortune."

"It is possible," said Clotilde gaily.

"Then why don't you, who are in all ways so superior to me, who know everything while I know nothing, do the same?"

"To you," said Clotilde, interrupting, "such a thing is possible—but not me."

"Why not?"

Her god-mother, not without difficulty then made her understand that her name, rank and birth condemned her to idleness; that a common woman could support herself by her labors and so obtain, within certain limits, fortune, but that for a lady reduced in circumstances it was very different, and that the more elevated the position and education she had received from her noble family the less right she had to abandon herself to labor, whatever kind it might be.

Fleurette, grieved but not convinced, silently bowed her head, and said to herself: "If that is the case I will make a fortune for both of us."

The next day Clotilde and the marquise went to Brittany, and Fleurette obedient to her god-mother's orders, went to her first reading and catechism lesson.

PART II.

Chapter I.

More than two months had elapsed since Clotilde's departure, and if the reader wishes to follow us we ask his permission to conduct him into the entrance of the Opera, not the one opening on the boulevard, but that which leads to the theatre lobbies.

We will ask him to stop a moment before a small flower-stand, neat, elegant, and even slightly coquettish, but very small, for it is composed of but a single compartment, containing only two or three square yards. In the *passage de l'Opera* rents are high.

A young girl is seated among the flowers inside the counter; her serious, even somewhat sad countenance contrasts with her joyous surroundings. For the first time a smile is wanting on the vermilion lips; even a few wrinkles furrow the brow, ordinarily so white and smooth.

Leaning her cheek on her hand and her elbow resting on the counter she attentively reads and re-reads an open letter before her, for Fleurette—it is she—now knows how to read. And she can write also; less perfectly, it is true. Her letters, grandly designed, still preserve traces of the copy-book, and would confine themselves with difficulty within the dimensions of a *billet-doux*; but they are at least decipherable.

It must be acknowledged that for over two months she had worked as she promised she would, day and night, with an assiduity and perseverance which belonged to her. She had ceased seeing Michelette and her shop companions; she had also quit going to pleasure-parties, or promenades, even on Sundays.

The commencement had been hard, then the work be

came easier, till at last through progress, it became a pleasure. She already comprehended that the obligation imposed upon her by Clotilde was a means of success and fortune, and this fortune which she now dreamed of not for herself but for her god-mother, was the constant aim of all her desires, an extravagant ambition if you will but an excusable one, for it proceeded from the heart.

As soon as Fleurette was able to decipher writing she hastened to read, to *herself* read(what happiness!),a friend's letter, William's, which she had not wished to confide to anyone; and she had done well.

The letter, which she had believed to be simply one of advice or counsel, was more important; she was reading it now; here are the contents:

"Mademoiselle Fleurette.

"I have arrived in the country in good health, and on my "first walk I stumbled in the snow upon the red flowers "which you so much loved and of which we have so often "conversed together in Paris.

"I will not say it was this which made me think of you, "because I am constantly doing that; but it suggested to "me the idea of sending you some, believing they would "please you, coming as they do from the country, and, also, "perhaps, as coming from me—although I may be mistaken; "you will tell me.

"I have consulted our *cure* in regard to this flower and "he has told me its name and written it down for me, or I "should never have been able to remember it; is the *Alpes-"tris Stella*, of the *rhododendrum ferrugineum* family, which "we commonly call the *Star* (or the *Rose*) *of the Alps*. "It grows only in the snow, he says, at four or five thou-"sand feet above the level of the sea. They last all winter; "so, madomoiselle, I will send you as many as you want by "Bâle and Strasbourg railway train that arrives day after "to-morrow, and, as to the expressage, allow me to make "you a present of it. I have fallen heir to my uncle's estate, "a small farm, and I am rich, richer even than you, which "encouraged me, before my departure, to go and tell you "that I loved you and ask you if you would take me for a "husband; and all I have wished in return was a reciprocal "feeling on your part, which I doubted.

"You are too young, which is not your fault; I am not "young enough, which is not mine. You already have, two "lovers. Think if you would like it! you are virtuous, I "know, but that will not last long when one has as much "pleasure in regarding gold chains and jewels as you have. "It is this which makes me afraid; I am unable to give you "such things. You would only find here a poor fellow who "has loved you for a long time, and a good husband who "would love you always. If this is sufficent, come! I await "you. If it is not, do not come; we would both be un- "happy. It is better that one of us only should be so."

This letter so full of reason, which Fleurette had received after her conversation with Clotilde in the church, made her look at life under a very different aspect. A husband presented himself, a brave and honest fellow whom her godmother would have advised her to accept.

But, while appreciating all of Williams good qualities, she did not love him, and besides, as we have said other ideas entirely absorbed her just then, ideas of fortune and ambition.

She answered William in as short a letter as possible and one which it took several days to compose; it was to the following purpose:

"An affair, on which my fate depends, occupies me at "present, my good William; give me two years yet in "which to finish it. If by that time you still think me "worthy of you I believe I will take you at your word. Until "then, send me every week by the railway a case of those "flowers which your *cure* calls *Alpestris Stella*, on condition "you understand, that I pay for them. Otherwise, I do not "want them."

Fleurette, as we already know, was economical and active, prudent and bold; which means that she had all that is necessary to success in business, above all in the flower business, which she understood marvellously well. She knew what a great part frivolity, fashion and caprice played in this trade.—She had seen fashion depart from one shop under the most frivolous pretext, and all at once attach itself to another for a still more trifling reason.

In reading William's letter a sudden thought had occur- to her. She had said to herself that if next winter the

fashion, that is Parisian society, would take under its protection these Alpine flowers, then almost unknown in Paris, her fortune would be made.

Influenced by this idea she employed all her savings, deposited in the savings-bank, in renting and ornamenting a little stand in the passage of the Opera house.

M. Rymbaud, her former friend, came to her assistance; he garnished her small shop with the hot-house plants which were indispensable to the business. As to the *Alpestris Stella*, of the *rhododendrum ferrugineum* family, William took care to keep her well supplied with them. But the Rose, or Star of the Alps, despite its beautiful purple color, excited little curiosity.

In vain was the stand fresh and attractive, and the proprietor yet more so; she was not known, no one came specially to her shop, and those who passed before her windows did not stop. Her rent, which was considerable, went on all the time, while the flowers, whether they were sold or not, lasted only a day, except the Star of the Alps, daughter of cold and solitude, which continued alive and found itself in its element.

Far from advancing on the road to fortune Fleurette had made a bad speculation, and saw little by little her capital disappearing.

These were the reflections to which she had abandoned herself when we saw her at the commencement of this chapter, her cheek resting on her hand, reading William's letter. He was the least formidable of all her creditors. In the first place she did not owe him very much, and then she had two years in which to pay him. But her landlord, and M. Rymbaud!—they must be paid at the end of the month. —How could she do it?

Fleurette lacked neither spirit, imagination, nor *finesse*, and the kind of education she had received for some months, the journals and placards that she could now read, gave her a slight knowledge of advertisement and editorial announcements, the means through which one now a days gains reputation and merit; but however cheap things may be they are still too dear for those who have nothing, and Fleurette was in that very predicament; her cash-box was empty.

No purchaser had presented himself throughout the day, the clock in the lobby had sounded mid-night. This hour, ordinarily one of repose, to-night was of the noisiest.

It was carnival time, an unusual crowd of masks and dominos squeezed through the two passages, and except the stands for costumes, bon-bons and pastry all the shops, including Fleurette's, were closed. It obliged her, sad and discouraged, to think of returning home, for she only inhabited her shop during the day, and still lived in the *rue de Navarin.*

She thought over twenty projects, each more ingenious and impracticable than the other, for saving her commercial house and threatened credit, and to-night was for her the most disturbed she had ever passed through.

Day was commencing to break when she re-entered her shop, and she looked as fatigued as if she had just returned from the Opera ball.

Noise and traffic quickly commenced in all quarters of the great city; already carriages rolled along the boulevards, shops and cafés were opened, merchants were behind their counters, and the people who bought, breakfasted, or went for a stroll were already at their posts.

It was not far from mid-day when Fleurette, who uneasy, vainly awaited customers, saw enter a small, elegant young man, in morning dress, with an easy air and the good manners of the financial world; he was a diminutive exchange-broker.

"Mademoiselle, I wish some flowers—some flowers—"

"What kind, monsieur?"

"I forget the name. A kind of flower—scientific—that *savants* only ought to carry in their button-holes, and which I intend putting in mine."

"A new kind of rhododendron, the *Alpestris Stella?*"

"Precisely, mademoiselle."

"Which can only be found here," said Fleurette.

"That is what they pretend."

"Here it is, monsieur."

"I recognize it. A red flower, a superb red, beautiful color—and no odor," said he smelling at it, "it is astonishing!"

"That is it's nature, monsieur"

"I do not say no, but it is astonishing. How much, mademoiselle?"

"Fifty francs, monsieur," said Fleurette timidly.

"Ah, bah!" said the young man, astonished.

"But remember, monsieur, they are brought all the way from the mountains of Switzerland, from Righi, where they were gathered the day before yesterday."

"I understand—the rather that I know the Swiss, and Righi."

"You have been in Switzerland, monsieur?"

"No, but I have a brother who barely escaped going there—fine country!—beautiful flowers!—but fifty francs;—it is a fabulous price—without counting," said he, again sniffing at it," that it is odorless. I am going to breakfast at the *cafe Riche;* I will see, as I return, if the *Alpestris Stella* is any lower."

Left alone, Fleurette reflected.

"Fifty francs!" said she. "I was wrong; it is too cheap, the great world will not patronize me."

A moment later there appeared a grave and distinguished looking gentleman, of about 35 years of age. He had evidently left his carriage on the boulevard, at the entrance of the passage, for he was followed by a servant in gorgeous livery, who remained at the shop-door, apparently being barely able to sustain both himself and his livery.

"Mademoiselle, I desire a new species of rhododendron, the *Alpestris Stella.*"

"Here is one, my lord."

"How much, mademoiselle?"

Without hesitation Fleurette boldly replied:

"One hundred francs, my lord."

The gentleman coolly placed the hundred francs on the counter, placed the rhododendron in his button hole, and, followed by his servant, walked gravely out.

"I was right," said Fleurette, "that is the proper price."

A young man, coming from the *faubourg Saint-Germain* and on his way to the *bois de Boulogne*, descended at the entrance, leaving his horse with his groom, and entered the shop with an important air; he wished a certain

flower which he must have at any price that very morning, and which he bought without haggling.

Next a young *attache* of an embassy also asked for a Star of the Alps, which was indispensable to his promenade in the *Bois;* an admirable flower, he said, which he did not even look at, and which he carried away with a thoughtful air.

Fleurette, her eyes radiant with joy, put her treasure in her cash box; but all at once she became grave, and her face assumed a serious expression at the sight of the person who just then entered her shop.

It was Ludovic Durussel, who himself turned pale upon beholding Fleurette. He had not seen her since the Charlotte episode; and although his vanity had been wounded he did not wish to let it appear, and, affecting great gaiety, cried:

"Is it possible! You, Fleurette, the mistress of this modest and charming little shop! I came to seek an unknown flower, and find one that I know, for we are still friends, are we not?" Then he went on with a forced air of levity, "I am good natured—I was enchanted with your treachery, which caused me a charming surprise, by which I profited. That little Charlotte, the friend you sent in your place, acquitted herself marvellously of her commission."

"For some days I have been very happy; and even last night at the Opera ball," he continued, with a very conceited air, "I had an intrigue with a delicious domino, a young countess whom I perfectly recognized; she gave me an appointment for to-day, at two o'clock, in the *bois de Boulogne.* She permits me to accompany her carriage, to be her cavalier, and even to wear her colors—a strange flower which shone on her domino, the Star of the Alps, a marvel which one can only find, she said, at this shop. Is it true?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Fleurette, somewhat troubled.

At this moment there entered a young nobleman, of from twenty to twenty-five years of age: I say a young *nobleman* for that ought to be the best title for a true gentleman, as our fathers understood it: a tall and elegant figure; proud yet mild eyes: gracious and handsome features

rich apparel and yet in good taste; and finally there was that distinction of manner about his whole person which formerly made people say of the dukes de Guise; "Beside them all other princes had a plebeian air."

He came in as Ludovic was attentively examining the purple leafed flower which Fleurette had handed him.

"That is the last Star of the Alps," she was saying, "I will have no more until to morrow."

"I take it!" cried the young unknown quickly.

"Permit me, sir," said Ludovic, "I am examining it."

"But you have not purchased it yet, sir," said the unknown, smiling.

"I may, though," said Ludovic dryly; "I came for that purpose."

"And I, also," responded the other. "The simplest and fairest way is to put it up at auction."

"There appeared at the shop-door, toothpick in hand, the young broker in embryo who had made an excellent breakfast at the *cafe Riche*, and who was now come to see if the *Alpestris Stella* had decreased in price.

"So be it, sir" responded Ludovic, "'to the least and highest bidder', as they say in *La Dame Blanche*. How much is this flower?" he asked turning towards Fleurette with the air of a man determined to purchase it."

"Fix the price yourself, my beautiful child graciously said the stranger.

"In spite of the numerous demands," responded Fleurette, making the most of her own merchandise, "we have irrevocably fixed the price at one hundred francs."

"One hundred per cent, higher since morning," said the young broker, astonished, and who had mechanically pulled out his purse.

"One hundred francs!" said Ludovic, making a grimace, "it is dear, but no matter."

"I will give two hundred," said the unknown negligently.

"What are you thinking of?" cried Ludovic. Then repressing himself he added ill humoredly, "I bid five francs more."

"Five hundred francs!" said the unknown slowly.

Seeing the silence caused by the general astonishment he cried:

"No one bids more; sold!" And he presented a five hundred franc note to Fleurette.

"What is that for?" said she, pushing it back with her hand.

"What I owe you, the price agreed upon."

"By you," replied the flower-girl, "but not by me. There is only one price here, that which I make; I recognize no other."

"Monsieur," said she, pointing to the broker, "did not wish this morning to give me enough, and now you want to give me too much. I do not intend that anyone shall bargain with me for either too little or too much. It is *one hundred francs*!"

"Here is a singular shop-keeper," said the unknown, regarding her attentively, "and more, a pretty one! Let us see," said he smiling, and rolling the note between his fingers, there no other way of arranging this affair?"

"No," said Fleurette dryly. "A hundred francs! take it or leave it."

"I take it, then," cried the unknown, seizing the flower and putting it in his button hole; "and I beg you to send one of these flowers to my house every morning."

"Where is it?" quickly inquired Fleurette.

If the other two spectators of this scene did not ask the same question they at least made their curiosity manifest by their interrogative looks.

The stranger took out a visiting card, which he deposited on Fleurette's counter, and departed, after graciously saluting the two young men.

Glad to know how to read Fleurette hastened to seize the card, and underneath a coat of arms and a Spanish device, which she did not understand, she read these words: *Duke d' Olona*, faubourgh Saint Honoré."

"Duke d'Olona!" cried the budding broker, "it no longer astonishes me."

"Fernand d'Olona!" said Ludovic. "I can well believe it! it is ten thousand francs he should have given you!"

"Why?" demanded Fleurette, curious.

"Why?" said the broker, shrugging his shoulders.

"Why?" repeated Ludovic, in an ill humor, "all the world will tell you."

Then the two gentlemen left the shop.

From that day it was an established fact on the Bourse, at the Council of State, in the diplomatic corps, and at last even in the fashionable world, that the *Alpestris Stella* was priceless, and that the only place to find it was at the shop of Fleurette, the flower-girl, in the Opera Arcade.

CHAPTER II.

The duke d'Olona, father of the present young duke, was a friend of the marquis de la Romana, of Riego, of those brave and noble Spaniards who had defended the independence of their country and the rights of their sovereign at the price of their fortunes and their blood.

And, as a return from the king, who had refused to keep the engagements they had made in his name, they were all imprisoned, executed, or exiled; and Ferdinand VII, whose crown they had preserved, proved his gratitude by confiscating their estates.

Entirely ruined, for he had been to much occupied with his country to attend to his own affairs, the duke d'Olona sought a refuge in the Spanish colonies of South America, which were commencing to secede from the mother country. There he had met a Frenchman, an exile like himself, a general celebrated in the wars of the Empire who, proscribed by one of the proclamations of Louis XVIII, had no other means of living but his labor, no other consolation than his daughter, the angel of his exile. The duke d'Olona could not see her without loving her.

He had neither titles nor fortune to offer her, only a life of miseries and sufferings; she accepted him, and shared with a heroic devotion all the chances of his destiny; exile flight, prison, and even war, for more than once she followed him to the field of battle.

The struggle was long; but, after their triumph, the republics of the New World, less ungrateful than kings, worthily recompensed the general to whom they owed their liberty. Not only did they lavish commands and honors on him; not only did they make him president many times; but they also awarded him, and his widow after him, national recompenses. They were granted an immense tract of land, consisting of prairie, forests and mountains; where later on gold mines, which proved very valuable, were discovered.

Madame d'Olona had but one child, a son, born in the later years of her married life, and after her husband's death she consecrated herself entirely to the education of Fernand, now her only love. She was a French-woman, and had never forgotten her native land, and had therefore given her son an education altogether French, an education which she never ceased watching over. Able masters were charged with the cultivation of his intellect and the formation of his mind; she alone took charge of his heart, and strove to transmit to him all the noble qualities with which she herself was endowed.

Tired of discord and war, surfeited with ambition, fatigued with storms, she wished her son's career to be peaceable and happy, and to that end she had inspired him with the love of study and art, tastes which elevate the soul and ennoble it.

Above all she had sought to inspire in him a sentiment, one held in high honor by our fathers but very rare in our own days, that of *respect for women.* She had succeeded without difficulty; Fernand had but to look at his mother and think of all the virtues of which she was a model.

She often spoke to him of France. Affairs of the greatest importance still detained her in America, but she would often say:

"If we cannot revisit together the land of my birth, my son, promise me that you will return there after my death, and carry there this fortune which your father has gained by his labors and paid for with his blood. It is there, promise me, that you will choose your wife; and there, happier than I, that you will end your days."

Fernand, embracing her, interrupted

"Reassure yourself, mother, we will go there together."

This happiness was not to be his. A scourge which was then prevalent, the yellow fever, carried off his mother; and for a long while his own life was in danger, the result of the care he had lavished upon her,

Nothing detained him any longer in this fatal place. On the contrary each step recalled a sad and cruel remembrance. To faithfully obey his mother, even though she was no more, seemed to him his first duty. He realized in part the immense fortune which was now absolutely at his own disposal From letters which came from Spain he learned that the titles and estates of his father had been returned to him. He was too rich.

Son of an ex-president of a Republic, he was also a duke and grandee of Spain. Better than all he was young, and life opened itself to him with all its illusions.

The respect for all women that his mother had inspired him with went to such an extent that the transition from respect to adoration had been so easy, that he was unconscious of it. He had a deep and serious reverence for them joined to a chivalric and impassioned gallantry.

In Spain, he had gone direct to Madrid, at the Court of the queen, the young duke Fernand d'Olona had achieved the greatest success, and at Paris, where he had now been for some months, he was the hero of *salons*, the king of fashion.

They went into raptures over the beauty of his horses and carriages, the royal luxury of his mansion in the faubourg Saint Honore, the magnificence of his gardens and conservatories, the richness and good taste of his furniture, but, above all, over the picture gallery that few were admitted to and of which everyone spoke marvels. It contained only portraits, busts and statues of women. Antique groups, Canova's statues, the works of Titian, Tintoretto, Corregio and Raphael; a complete collection of Greuze's, and every day was added some new *chef d'œuvre*, ancient or modern, purchased at any price.

A friend of beauty in the arts and, above all, in women, he stopped before the outline of a regular profile, a graceful oval, a well shaped neck. a supple, elegant figure, or a white hand with rosy tapering fingers as he would have done before

a handsome picture or a fine statue ; it was not love ; it was, as we have said, the worship, the adoration of the beautiful!

Besides, his oddities injured no one, and the mania he had of admiring pretty woman had not yet made him an enemy.

The maréchale de Boufflers said to her son: "If you wish to get on in the world make love to all the women."

Fernand had put this system in practice without knowing it. In a *salon* he was amiable and gallant towards all: the young wife, the younger girl, and even the grand-mother seemed to have an equal right to his homage ; he said, as in Demonstier's pretty verses:

"*L'une plait, l'autre a plu ; l'autre commence a plaire ;*
Son cœur, ivre d'amour, d'espoir, de souvenir,
Adorait le présent, le passé, l'avenir." *

One may judge whether with such a character, without taking into consideration his name, figure and immense fortune, good fortune ought not to attend him. And still he had not as yet known any serious passion. Another merit ; he was discreet: or perhaps he was too much in love with all women to be sincerely in love with any.

The Opera, it is perhaps needless to say, had directed all its batteries against him ; more than one young nymph had for a time enchained, loved, and even betrayed him. Betrayed *him*? do you say. Yea, verily, himself; like everybody else! He accepted his reverses and triumphs like a perfect gentleman. At parting he would even load the ingrate who had deceived him with generous presents ; and, resigned to his fate, go away repeating:

"He who pleases is king! he who no longer pleases is nothing!"

One evening, at the period at which we have now arrived, it was carnival time, he had heard praised the Opera *bals masques* and their celebrated saturnalias, which were spoken of freely enough among young men, but which in the fashionable world no one ever acknowledged having been at.

In a city like Paris a strange young man likes to find out

* One pleases, another has pleased, the other commences to please ;
His heart, intoxicated with love, hope and remembrance,
Adores the present, the past, and the future.

everything for himself, so Fernand communicated his project to nobody, and, enveloping himself in a large black domino, went alone and incognito to the Opera ball.

He had not been there more than a quarter of an hour before he became disgusted. He was one whom such a spectacle was the least likely to please, and, tired of these ignoble orgies wherein French youth of that day went to seek lessons in elegance, politeness and good taste which it has since brought into literature and society, the duke d'Olona took refuge in the lobby. *That* only could offer him traces of the old *bals de l'Opera* which our ancestors loved. Each century to its taste. *Then* there were no cries nor vociferations of shameless women, nor disorderly dances; in fact there were no dances at all; this was perhaps bizarre in a ball, but recommended itself by other merits. It was a vast conversation *salon* where gentlemen and ladies who had wit could employ it. Nothing hindered them. The liberty of the mask added an additional charm to the vivacity of the attacks and repartees. There a thousand *piquante* intriques were concocted which, even after the carnival, were prolonged and unraveled in our *salons*. Joyous souvenirs which tempered the severities of Lent to our grandmothers. Balls, the horror of the jealous but favorable to love: the arsenal of epigrams and *bon mots*, where French spirit recruited itself, and where the gayety was at least not opposed to good taste and decency.

Just now this was not the case. One saw in this vast lobby a considerable crowd of ladies in black dominos and young gentlemen in evening dress. The elegance of certain dominos, the freshness of ribbons, and the wealth of laces betrayed the woman of the world who from curiosity had wished to see, and who said with Athaliah: "I have seen." Finding that they had even seen too much, more than one had quitted the theatre, where the infernal round went on, and had, like Fernand, come to seek refuge in the lobby.

We have said that Fernand was completely masked. Otherwise ladies would have recognized and intrigued with him. Already many young men, pursued by their light epigrams, racked their brains trying to divine the names of their malicious persecutors.

Ludovic was among the number; a little domino, who

had escaped him and was lost in the crowd, had whispered in his ear a secret which he had believed that no one knew.

This same domino appeared an instant later at the extremity of the lobby surrounded by three or four young gentleman following in her steps.

"Leave me, leave me!" said she, while fleeing.

"Fair mask, where shall I meet you again?" said one, pressing her with entreaty.

"To-morrow at the *bois de Boulogne*. I go there every day."

"How shall I recognize you?"

"By this flower I carry at my waist."

"I never saw one like it before."

"That is because you go oftener to balls than to the Horticultural Gardens."

"You are right, fair mask, I am not a *savant*."

"You should become one, if it is only to know the flowers."

"While waiting to become one tell me this flower's name."

"The *Alpestris Stella*."

"A valuable flower?"

"Yes."

"Like the one you wear?"

"Yes."

"It comes from a lover?"

"You deceive yourself. I bought it just now in the Opera Arcade from mademoiselle Fleurette, the florist; I cannot prevent your doing the same, and appearing to-morrow at the *bois de Boulogne*—"

"Wearing your colors?"

"Yes."

"Beside your carriage?"

"Yes."

"And shall I salute you—speak to you?"

"No one must speak to me."

"Are you married, fair mask?"

"Perhaps."

"When, then, shall I meet you again?"

"Here, in eight days. Now leave me."

The little domino disappeared; but, an instant after, the

young woman, overtaken by another cavalier, had exactly the same dialogue in almost the same words with him, and then escaped to become once more lost in the crowd.

Fatigued with her long and triumphant promenade, the little domino in order to enjoy a moment's rest threw herself on a divan, not far from the fire-place, on which another domino was already seated.

Under this disguise there was a young cavalier who, it was easy to see, took little interest in the pleasures of the ball. He had a drowsy, or rather a wearied, air. Why not leave, then? We don't know. But he frequently regarded the clock on the mantle like a man who had made an appointment with his mistress, his friend, or his carriage for—say three o'clock in the morning, and who found with regret that it was not yet more than two.

The unknown did not say a word; the little domino was silent. Three handsome young gentlemen, conversing together, approached the fire-place to warm themselves. They were speaking of a young singer who had made her *début* at the Italian Opera with immense success. They praised her beauty, her talent, and her virtue.

"The Duke d' Olona," said one of the young men, "with whom I dined to-day, is enraptured with her."

"Is he her lover?" said another.

"No;" replied the first, "he is my friend and conceals nothing from me. He has shown me a letter he has written to her, and which he will send to-morrow; a very original letter."

"Really?" said the other two.

"A charming, delicious letter, and worthy of him."

"Do you remember it?"

"Here is about the sense of it; he first compliments her on her voice, and, above all, on her discretion. He encourages her to persevere, offering her thirty thousand francs if she continues to be discreet, sixty if she ceases to be so; and in the latter case gallantly demands for himself the preference."

"It is perfect," cried the others, "that alone describes him thoroughly."

"That alone," repeated the little black domino in a high voice, "would give me a very bad opinion of him!"

This phrase launched by a clear little voice in the midst of a concert of eulogies produced a singular effect. The three young gentlemen uttered exclamations and the cavalier in the black domino gave a start, but reseated himself and remained silent. As to the three young men, they quickly interrogated the little mask.

"Why, fair mask, does such generosity excite your indignation? If one has reasons, one gives them."

"I have some, but will not give them."

"Why? why?"

"In the first place because I do not wish to;" gravely responded the little mask, "and also because I have an idea that you would not understand them."

"That is very complimentary," cried the young men; and they walked away laughing.

The little domino wished to arise, but the unknown cavalier detained her with his hand.

"Fair mask," asked Fernand, for it was he, "why have you such a bad opinion of the Duke d'Olona? Do you know him?"

"No."

"Have you seen him?"

"Never!"

"You have heard of him?"

"This is the first time."

Fernand experienced a slight feeling of annoyance which he was careful not to let appear, and gaily replied:

"How do you picture him to yourself?"

"Old and ugly."

Fernand uttered a shout of laughter.

"'Old and ugly'—what makes you think so?"

"Because he requires money to make young girls love him."

Fernand bit his lips, and had he not been masked one could have seen the blood mount to his forehead. He drew near the little domino, and said:

"You are eccentric, fair mask, but if you are just you will at least admit that upon this occasion M. d'Olona's intentions are good and generous."

"Neither good or generous."

"If you can prove that to me!" said he quickly,

"What is it to you?" said she negligently.

"Much!"

"Very well! To offer her thirty thousand francs to remain virtuous, and sixty not to, is plainly to tempt her, to encourage her choose the latter part—which the poor child will probably do."

"Do you think so?" said Fernand with emotion.

"It is always so," sighed the little domino, "and who will be the most to blame? she or he? the inexperienced young girl or the old man?"

"You still believe he is old?" impatiently cried Fernand.

"Of course. I have proved it to you, I hope," replied she, "and now, fair sir, I am sure that you no longer doubt it."

Fernand lowered his head, but made no reply.

"He is old then," affirmed the young unknown, "and in place of being generous he is the opposite."

Fernand raised his head.

"It is not generosity at all," she laughingly continued. "He does not give, he buys; and perhaps even below the value. Yes," she cried with warmth, "who knows but that young girl, like many others, possesses good and noble sentiments, soon suppressed, that are of more value perhaps, than all M. d'Olona's money."

Fernand wishes to speak, but she would not give him time.

"Finally," she continued, less seriously, "do you call that generosity which advertises itself in advance, or gets its friends to do so, whose only aim is to be talked about and to make a noise in the world? Be sure, dear sir, that after all it is only praise paid to one's self; and if he pays dear for it, it is because he has so much gold and still more vanity."

Fernand could make no reply; but as he had more sense than vanity, he said to himself: "I am glad my friends are no longer here, for she is right."

"I am of your opinion, fair mask," at length said he aloud, "d'Olona does not amount to much."

"Is it not so?" said the domino with an air of convic-

tion. "If I had been this old duke, here is what I should have done."

"Let us see," said Fernand quickly, "what would you have done."

"Without seeking to create an effect and gain notoriety I would have simply written: 'I give you thirty thousand francs to help you to be virtuous, or sixty thousand to assist you in choosing a husband.'"

"Ah!" cried Fernand, with a warmth which proceeded from the heart, "that is better! Happily the letter is not sent. Yes," he continued, repressing himself. "I believe they said just now that the letter had not yet gone. Listen, fair mask; I know d'Olona, I will see him to-morrow, and hope to make him adopt your suggestion."

"All the better for him!"

"But," said he, hesitatingly, "if I succeed I would like, fair mask, to acquaint you with my success. How can I?"

She made no response.

"Where can I meet you—see you?"

"Here in eight days, at the next ball, at two o'clock, by the corner of this mantel."

"Very well, I will be here. But eight days—that is a long while."

"It will pass quickly."

"Not for me, who find you so charming."

"What do you know of me?—neither my features nor my age."

"Yes I do—if I am right you are of a ripe age."

"I!" said she indignantly.

"Why not?" said Fernand, laughing, "you think d'Olona is old! Let me finish. Judging from the sound of your pure and fresh voice, you are young; from your words, you are bright; from your hand," taking it in his and examining it with the air of a connoisseur, "you are of a delicate and distinguished style of beauty; that is why I wish to see you."

Through the eyes of the mask shone a flash of joy and coquetry.

"Which means that you no longer speak for d'Olona, but for yourself."

"Yes," he gaily replied.

"All in good time—well, in eight days."

"And until then," said he regretfully, "is there no way of meeting you? Are you going to the Marquise d'Equilly's to-morrow evening?"

She laughed, and said: "I believe not."

"Or to the Spanish Embassy, Thursday?"

"Possibly. But it would astonish me very much."

"No matter," cried Fernand, "I will go. And do you not go to the *bois* in the mornings?"

"Sometimes. To-morrow, perhaps."

"I will go every day; but in what part shall I find you?"

"Seek."

"How shall I recognize you?"

She remained silent an instant, then smiled and recommenced the dialogue we have already heard.

"You will know me by this flower I carry at my girdle."

"Ah!" said the duke, examining it, "it does not belong to this country, it is an Alpine flower."

"You are learned," said she, regarding him with an air of consideration, "yes, it is the *rhododendrum ferrugineum*, that they call *Alpestris Stella*."

"Ah! you know everything," said Fernand astonished, "even botany, I have a favor to ask of you, fair mask."

"A favor—from me?" said she laughing, "Speak!"

"Eh! well, for love of science, or rather," said he tenderly, "for love of you, give me this flower you have worn all the evening."

"Certainly not, it might compromise me."

"I understand," said he sadly, "it comes to you from a dear hand."

"It comes to me," said the little domino, laughing, "from the Opera Arcade, from mademoiselle Fleurette, the florist, of whom I bought it, I do not hinder you, fair sir, from doing likewise and appearing in the *bois de Boulogne* decked in my colors."

"I will be there to-morrow, and every day!" cried Fernand. "Will you permit me to appear on horseback beside your carriage?"

"I will, if you can find it."

"I shall find it," said he confidently.

"In any case," said she, "here, in eight days."

She arose, and, in spite of all his efforts to detain her, disappeared in the crowd. Fernand looked at his watch, it was four o'clock in the morning. He had talked with the little mask for two hours.

CHAPTER III.

Let us turn back for a moment to the evening when Fleurette, sad and discouraged, almost despaired of her commercial fortune.

We left her closing her shop at the moment when the *bal de l'Opera* was commencing. She went slowly towards her home thinking over ways to make a reputation for her rhododendrons and attract public attention to them. It was after midnight, and almost the only shops open at that hour were those of the costumers. In one of the most brilliant of these she saw mademoiselle Justine and M. Larose choosing costumes. They also saw her and consulted her taste in regard to what they should choose, and while she was giving her advice many elegant carriages stopped before the same shop.

The occupants of these carriages were young gentlemen who, coming from the theatres, were taking little *lorettes* to the masked ball. The ladies entered a boudoir to try on costumes, while the young men remained seated in the *salon*, yielding themselves up to the charms of cigars and, without bothering themselves whether Fleurette who was seated in a retired corner could hear them or not, they conversed with admirable freedom of their loves, their affairs, and their innermost secrets.

Fleurette, who was waiting until mademoiselle Justine's toilet was finished before leaving, at first, like a woman, listened from mere curiosity and for the simple pleasure of listening. Then, an idea all at once entered her head, a sublime and victorious idea, which made her listen for

speculative purposes. It seemed to her that she had found, in an instant and in the simplest manner in the world, the way to solve the problem which had occupied her for some days past. In any case what did she risk? The loss of a few hours' sleep and the price of a domino.

She let Justine go away; then she very attentively regarded the handsome dandies and young fashionables who were passing before her; noted well in her memory their names and the principal anecdotes they indiscreetly told; and, an hour later, dressed in a quiet domino, elegantly shod and gloved, and carrying at her belt a beautiful Star of the Alps, she was in the centre of the Opera lobby.

She intrigued with all the young fops as she met and recognized them (Ludovic among the first), piquing their vanity or flattering their pride, exciting their curiosity without ever satisfying it, and above all occupying herself with the interests of the florist, for whom she thus prepared a numerous and wealthy *clientele*.

All with whom she had intrigued had left her delighted with their evening and charmed by the delicious little black domino; each believed he had detected an acquaintance in her; one thought her a countess; another, a marchioness; all, a cruel beauty who, relaxing her severity, had profited by the liberty of the masquerade to show herself less severe and commence an intrigue, for which this flower was only a means or pretext. They all saw in it simply an accessory of the romance, while Fleurette looked upon it as the principal part of the affair.

Success responded to her calculations and hopes. For on the next day each hastened to conquer with gold the enchanted flower, the magic talisman, which was to attract the eyes of last night's mysterious beauty. They all sought the fair one in the *bois de Boulogne*, but did not find her. Many thought they recognized her, while others, deceiving themselves, had saluted with a passionate regard and an air of intelligence some great lady who, completely innocent, had answered their salutes.

The less fortunate ones who had perceived nothing persuaded themselves that an uncle, a brother, or a jealous husband had compelled the poor victim to keep her eyes lowered, or had even prevented her from coming to the *bois*

that day, so they returned the next day. These were Fleurette's best clients; the shop was not yet well known nor the patronage very large, but it was good, rich and distinguished. Carriages stopped before the Arcade Entrance and servants in livery, the duke d'Olona's among others, came for bouquets every morning.

Modest and silent, Fleurette boasted to no one of her prosperity, but each evening put away the large receipts of the day.

Meanwhile d'Olona was out every day mounted on one of his handsomest horses. He could be seen scouring all the *allees* of the *bois de Boulogne* and watching all the carriages with interrogative, curious eyes.

People asked themselves what was this strange flower which he constantly wore in his button-hole and, as many other young gentlemen had been seen from time to time in the great promenade ornamented with the same flower, the dandies commenced to bother themselves and to inquire if this wasn't some new fashion, and if it would not be better to be among the first to adopt it, without knowing anything about it, than to have the air of following it later on.

Fernand had heard nothing more of the mysterious domino. Perhaps if he *had* met her he would have already forgotten her. But the disappointment he had experienced forced him to occupy himself with her, and he had now thought of her for eight days. So, on the following Saturday, he was seated near the mantel-piece in the Opera lobby at two o'clock in the morning. Fleurette was not yet at the *rendez-vous*, so he was obliged to wait, which rarely happened to him.

Fleurette, it must be confessed, had arrived at the ball some time before; but, occupied with her personal affairs, she had first given audience to her clients; who pursued her, pressing and overwhelming with questions and reproaches. She was not at all embarrassed in answering the first nor in defending herself from the latter. There were two things innate in her, spirit and coquetry; and her partial education had only developed her natural qualities.

A whole day passed in a shop is frequently very long and tedious; Fleurette knew how to shorten it and make it pleasant. Since she had learned how to read she had always

a book before her on her counter which she would only abandon to reply to her customers and to which she returned as to an old and faithful friend, whom one always recognizes. This desire for reading developed itself with such ardor that it became her sole passion, and the number of volumes devoured by her in a few months was something fabulous She borrowed these books from the Arcade news stand which by a rare exception and fortunately for her, contained more serious and useful works than romances. At length she had read them all! the serious part of her mind had made her appreciate the former and the innocence of her character allowed her to read the latter without danger. Besides she had already had sufficient experience to enable her to keep love and lovers at a distance. As to lovers those who just now surrounded her troubled neither her heart nor her head, and in defending herself from their attacks or in responding to their questions only one idea governed her: to preserve and increase her *clientele.*

She had read in the newspapers that the minister for Foreign Affairs would give a grand masked ball on the following Thursday. On this bare announcement she founded her whole plan of campaign.

Ludovic was the first to perceive the little black domino, at whose waist shone the Rose of the Alps. Taking her arm, he cried:

"Ah! fair, deceitful mask, I have gone to the *bois* five or six times and you have not been there."

"You searched badly."

"I haven't seen you."

"I was more fortunate; I saw you."

"Why didn't you wear the signal agreed upon?"

"You are very curious."

"Why did you not inform me of your presence by some sign?"

"Who knows? in order, perhaps, not to excite suspicion so that I might be permitted to come here this evening."

"Ah! you are charming!"

Thereupon entreaties redoubled, and also coquetries.

"I wish to know who you are, tell me."

"Never!"

"What! You will not make yourself known?"

"Perhaps.—Are you going to the minister's ball, next Thursday?"

"Yes, I am invited.—But how shall we find each other in such a disguised crowd?"

"How? Thanks to the Rose of the Alps, this flower, which we will both carry."

"Marvellous, and as everybody unmasks at supper—I comprehend."

"Well! till then go, leave me."

The little domino disappeared and thirty paces further on, met another suitor who held the same discourse with her and to whom she made very nearly the same responses.

She had already disposed of a dozen Stars of the Alps for the following Thursday evening when it struck two o'clock. She saw that it would take too much time to traverse the lobby in all it's length, stopped as she was at almost every step by importunate and curious cavaliers who detained her, so she took off the flower she carried at her belt and, thanks to this precaution, being now able to travel unknown, she soon arrived at the other end of the lobby. There she saw a domino whose size and figure she easily recognized, his back resting against the mantel, beating time on the floor with his foot and on the mantel-piece with his fingers; he was impatient and in an ill humor, which charmed her. He was evidently thinking of, and waiting for, her.

In order to assure herself of this s hewalked up in front of him; he did not even notice her. She drew from her pocket a certain flower which she slowly fastened in her belt. He perceived it, uttered a cry of delight, seized her hand, and forcing her to sit near him on a sofa, as at their last interview, said:

"Wicked little domino, you have made a fool of me,"

"This hasn't the look of it, since I am here. But if you wish to get angry—I will let you."

This permission dissipated all Fernand's wrath, though it is true he addressed her some reproaches, but in so sweet a tone that one might have easily mistaken them for tender caresses.

"Everyday since I last saw you I have ridden in the *bois* hoping to see you again."

"And I have seen you there."

"I doubt it, fair mask."

"Contrary to the custom of masks I do not speak falsely."

"Very well!" said he, thinking to confound her, "how was I dressed?"

Fleurette accurately described the costums he wore the day he came to buy his first Star of the Alps at the Opera Arcade.

"It is true," said he, "then why did you not address a word to me?"

"Because though one may converse with an unknown domino without compromising one's self, there might perhaps be more danger in doing so with M. le duc d' Olona."

"Ah!" cried Fernand, stupefied, "You know me?"

"Re-assure yourself," said she laughing, "that detracts nothing from the good opinion of you that our last interview gave me."

"That night," cried he quickly, "when you suggested to me such a good idea, which was put into execution the very next day; and I have sought you ever since in order to tell you of it."

"Ah!" said Fleurette, who could not help being moved:" I knew it—I know all," she smilingly continued, "and I am now sorry for having been so wicked to you."

"That does not prevent me from loving you, fair mask," said Fernand, "and that proves—"

"That you are kind-hearted, that is all."

"Ah! do not trifle with me any longer," he exclaimed in a low tone. "Duchess of Medina, it is you! I have recognized you; do you recall that in giving me your hand yesterday evening you said—"

"A fine chance to learn a secret," said Fleurette, interrupting him: "but be silent, for I am not the duchess."

"Impossible! it is your very self—it is you."

"If proofs are necessary," said she, taking off her glove, "look at this hand, which you just now spoke of."

Fernand seized it and cried, with surprise: "Ah! it is prettier than her's!"

"That is not my fault," said Fleurette, with a coquettish modesty.

"Yes, yes, I acknowledge that it is not she," said Fernand; "but don't you know that such a hand is enough to make me fall in love, and that I would commit all sorts of follies to win it?"

"You have already commenced."

"Listen, whoever you may be, listen to me!" And Fernand, carried away by his imagination, became so animated, so ardent, and so pressing that Fleurette, who was unaccustomed to such language and had never heard such sweet avowals uttered in so tender a voice, felt her head, if not her heart, becoming confused with this intoxicating music.

Happily a thought came to her aid and helped to dissipate her dream.

"Ah!" said she slowly, seeing him almost at her feet," I would only have to say one word, and on the instant—"

"Finish!—finish!" said the duke lovingly.

Fleurette remained silent; but she finished the sentence to herself: "I should only have to say: 'I am Fleurette, the florist, a shop-woman of the Opera Arcade,' to see this great nobleman instantly rise in indignation and contemptuously take me to task for the tendernesses he has lavished upon me and which I have stolen from some great lady."

This thought aroused all her pride, and reminded her of the *role* she had come to play; she once more became pitiless, and coldly said to the duke:

"Are you going to the minister's ball, Thursday?"

"Yes, certainly——a masked ball."

"Carry a flower like this to it. We will meet there, and I will speak to you."

As she finished speaking she made her escape, leaving the duke more surprised than ever at the eccentricity of the little domino, but also interested, curious, and almost in love; for as he went away he said aloud:

"Yes, *morbleu!* I will go."

CHAPTER IV.

It was a grand affair, that of the ball!

Fleurette, who, thoughtlessly perhaps, had decided to puzzle so many people, was not a little disturbed at the results of her audacity.

During the three or four days which followed the scene we have just described there came quite a crowd to the flower-girl's. Fleurette saw her cash-box become full and was unable to satisfy the demand for the *Alpestris Stella*, and she had written to her friend William to multiply and hasten the sending of those flowers which she bought so cheap and sold so dear.

But on reflection she commenced to get frightened. Not that she feared discovery; neither the duke d'Olona nor anyone else suspected that the history of the mysterious domino was simply a speculation of Fleurette's, and they paid her no more attention than to speak to her when making their purchases.

But what had she wished in the beginning? To draw attention and reputation to her shop; to establish an enduring patronage. And would the twelve or fifteen fashionable young gentlemen of the great world, whom she had so completely mystified, preserve a sufficiently agreeable recollection of this adventure to be often tempted to return to the house of *Fleurette and Co?*

As to the rhododendrons, the dreams of their prosperity which she had enjoyed became dissipated; next Thursday's ball would see their last triumph, and the minister's *salons* would probably prove their tomb.

She felt that this might not be a simple mystification, aimless and unremembered; it might be that they would never know the true answer to the enigma and the adventure would not cease to excite the general curiosity and so hold the spectators in suspense for a long time yet. Oh! *then* her success would be assured.

Nothing destroys the interest like a known denouement. Paris becomes enamored of a trial because judgment is not pronounced in the court; and if it never was pronounced it would be spoken of forever. Something ought to prolong the favor of the *Alpestris Stella*, but the day of the ball approached and Fleurette had not found out what that something was.

A valet in the d'Olona livery came the morning before the ball to order flowers, ordinary flowers, for his master's house. (We forgot to mention that after the day when Fernand had offered five hundred francs for one rhododendron, which offer Fleurette had refused, she had acquired the patronage of the duke d'Olona, which already excited the envy of some of her *confreres*, among others M. Rymbaud.) This valet remained only an instant; he was pressed for time, had errands to go and visits to make, numerous visits if one should judge by the three or four packages of visiting cards he carried.

A quarter of an hour after his departure Fleurette, in turning around, felt a small package under her feet. It contained armorial cards like that which the duke had given her the day of his first visit; only upon these, under the words Duc d'Olona, were written, doubtless in Fernand's hand, the directions; "For *madame la marquise d'Eqvilly*," "For *madame de Rinsberg*," For "*la duchesse de Medina*," etc, etc. There were in all fifteen of these cards, which the valet had probably let escape from among his other packages.

"Ah!" said Fleurette, giving a sigh of relief, "what a godsend! These cards come to my aid and save me."

The following night the minister's *salons* were splendidly illuminated. Next to the *Hotel de Ville*, the Foreign Affairs palace is undoubtedly the best place in Paris for giving a *fete*, not even excepting the *Tuilleries*, where locomotion is far from being easy.

Numerous masks wandered without obstacle and without crowding in these elegant and vast appartments which communicated with one another on all sides and which in addition to the richness of furniture and splendor of decoration possessed two other advantages, precious and very rare in the Parisian *salons* of our day, air and space.

The duc d'Olona, contrary to his usual custom, was among the first arrivals. Masked, as were all the guests, he wore a Spanish costume which became him marvellously and set off the elegance of his figure. Amidst the diamonds, with which his breast was covered, there showed a handsome purplish red flower, which attracted much attention.

The noble Spaniard occupied himself chiefly with the ladies and their costumes. After having been through all the *salons*; seeking apparently a beauty whom he did not find, he installed himself in the principal apartment and attentively examined all the ladies who entered; queen or beggar: Italian, German or Pole. As to the men, he did not even look at them; no matter how brilliant or original their costume.

Fernand, who, as we know, was not patient, had already waited a long time and had not yet seem anyone enter wearing the Star of the Alps, the object of all his desires. In retaliation for not having paid any attention to the men he he was saluted by a cavalier of the Middle Ages decorated with this very flower. An instant later another entered dressed in a rich Louis XIII costume, and ornamented with a similar flower; Then came a Circassian with the same flower; and at last a Chinese Mandarin, wearing in his head dress, in place of the gold button, still another of these flowers.

Astonished at this abundance of Alpine flowers the duke abandoned his post, entered the ball room, and there perceived many others. It had evidently been a good year for the *Alpestris Stella*, for he was surrounded by them. But the most singular thing about it was that all those carrying this flower seemed seeking like himself, an absent, invisible object which none of them found.

There was one moment when in the card-room and doubtless attracted by the solitude of the place, at least twenty of these Stars all at once found themselves together as if by appointment. A general astonishment manifested itself; it seemed as if one could read it on their faces though they were all masked.

"Pardon me, sir," d'Olona to his nearest neighbor, an Indian, "are you not seeking a small domino wearing a Star like your's?"

"Yes most noble hidalgo," responded the Indian prince, who was none other than Ludovic.

"And we also," repeated in succession, like a melancholy echo, the young diplomat, the broker's clerk, the Louis XIII gentleman, and the others, all in brilliant costumes, the expense of which they had incurred for nothing.

"Nevertheless, she promised me she would be here."

"And me, also," murmured another.

"I count upon her keeping her word."

"Upon her fidelity."

"Each of us has a right to only a twentieth, as I see it," said Fernand, counting his rivals, "but, after all, we are entitled to that much."

"And not to appear!" replied Ludovic.

"Not even to show herself! It is scandalous!"

"It is unhandsome conduct—"

"Such as the greatest coquette would not indulge in."

"Ah!" cried the mandarin, glancing into the next room, "she comes to surrender herself to our just reproaches, for at last I see her."

They all rushed forward and saw, actually, a charming little *marquise Pompadour*, wearing in the bosom of her blue silk dress a beautiful red, star shaped, flower.

D'Olona, furious, was about to address her, when he saw two Neapolitaines coming arm in arm from another *salon* and carrying in their hands bouquets of the same flowers. Further off a peasant of the canton of Appenzell carried one in her belt, and a Moorish woman wore a cluster in her hair.

As they advanced, the duke and his companions of misfortune should have found themselves only too happy; for, in place of the one belle they had expected, fifteen presented themselves to their eyes. But among all these beauties of every country which was the little black domino? and, embarrassed with riches, how divine, how choose?

D'Olona had entered into conversation with the marquise Pompadour, but after a very few minutes, he quickly perceived his error.

"Who gave you that flower, fair mask?"

"A handsome cavalier, of whom I am proud."

"Are you afraid to name him?"

"Certainly not."

"Then who is he?"

"The duke d'Olona sent it to me as I was about starting for the ball."

"Ah!" said Fernand, brusquely quitting her arm, "a new mystification."

He then addressed himself to the Moorish woman, but the first glance at her hand convinced him he was again wrong. Never mind;

"Fair mask, from whom came the flowers which shine in your hair?"

"From a gallant gentleman, long the enemy of my country; but the Moors and Spaniards, are now reconciled, as appears from this, for I received this bouquet from the duke d'Olona."

"Are you certain, fair mask," insisted he, "that he sent it?"

"Accompanied by a word in his own hand."

"This is too much," said d'Olona to himself, and then aloud: "and when was that?"

"This evening, as I started to the ball."

"Decidedly," said d'Olona again to himself, feeling the blood rush to his head, "it is a plot organized against me."

He just then found himself before a sofa on which were seated the two Neapolitaines. He looked for an instant: one was longer than the little domino; but the other had such pretty hands and feet that he expected in touching the former to at last reach his vengeance.

"And you also, fair mask," said he with an accent of anger which he tried to conceal under a gay air, "you have received this bouquet from the duke d'Olona, have you not?"

"Only just now," replied the little mask, "he sent it with his card, which I preserved."

"And I also," laughed the other, "as an autograph."

In his impatience, Fernand made such an abrupt movement that his mask slipped partially off.

"It is he!" said the two ladies.

"Ah!" cried Fernand, who had the greatest difficulty in refraining from bursting into a passion, "a card written is his own hand. I would like to see it."

"Here it is," said the two Neapolitaines, each presenting him one.

Fernand seized them. They were in reality two of his cards; they bore his name and arms; and, underneath, in his own hand writing, on one:

"For the Marquise d'Eqvilly," and the other: "For the duchesse de Medina."

"Ah! duchess, "cried he, greatly troubled," ah! marquise, kindly explain to me—"

What ails you!"

"Do not strike a man when he is on the ground. I acknowledge myself vanquished; but, after all, deign to explain to me what this means."

"What are you talking about?"

"In reality, whence come these flowers, these cards?"

"We ask you the same question."

"Eh! Zounds! I know nothing of it. I don't understand it, it makes one lose his head."

"For so little?" said the duchess gaily; "keep it yet a while, there are so many better occasions."

The adventure became still more complicated when the rest of the Stars of both sexes, whom they encountered at the ball, related the details of their adventures. All the cavaliers had received a *rendez-vous* from the little black domino. All the ladies had received a rich bouquet for the ball from the duke d'Olona. They were furious at being made the pretext for an intrigue without understanding it: the ladies were indignant at finding themselves implicated for a bouquet only; and the men, for nothing.

Everybody agreed that there was underlying it all a more grave and important affair than might at first be supposed a plot, which above all it was necessary to clear up. The moment was not favorable for this just now, at a ball, but they for this purpose agreed to hold a general assembly of stock holders of the Stars of the Alps, male and female, on the next day at the duchesse de-Medina's mansion. They also agreed, in order not to give the alarm to the author of the plot, to make nothing public, and to preserve the strictest silence, in regard to the affair.

Which was doubtless the reason that nothing, else was spoken of that evening at the ball, and the next day it was all over Paris.

CHAPTER V.

No one was absent from the assembly, it was a full meeting, and was tempestuous. They experienced great difficulty in coming to an agreement; first, on the nature of the conspiracy. What was the object of it? Against whom had it been aimed?

In every case these flowers, said the cavaliers, cost a hundred francs each, and such an expensive mystification could not have proceeded from an ordinary person. Therefore they must look for the author in the highest ranks.

Suspicion fastened itself in the first place upon a Russian Princess, celebrated for her eccentricities, the Princess Lazowkoff. But what could be her reason for sending, on the day of the ball, handsome bouquets to all the prettiest women in Paris.

"A supposition all the more unlikely," said madame d'Eqvilly, "that she is no longer beautiful and is growing old."

"Because she is envious and wicked," said madame de Rinsberg.

"And, finally," cried the duchess de Medina, "I have been her mortal enemy, since the night I waltzed with count Zouboff."

"And I with her little saxon chamberlain," said the baronne de Norval, "she did not send me bouquets then, but on the contrary swore that she would be revenged upon me."

"I know it," said the duchess, "she has everywhere repeated that she would revenge herself on us both. Ah, *mon Dieu!*" she continued, turning pale, if we should be on the track—"

"What is it?" cried all the women, pressing around her and offering their smelling bottles.

"If this was her vengeance—if the flowers were poisoned!"

The women uttered a cry of fright and the men a shout of laughter.

"What an idea!" cried Ludovic.

"Nevertheless, monsieur," quickly repeated the baronne de Narval, remember the fifth act of *Adrienne Lecouvreur;* one can easily poison with flowers. And in their projects of vengeance the ladies of the North are capable of any thing."

"But, thank Heaven!" said the duke d'Olona," you ladies all appear to be remarkably well."

"This morning!" cried madame de Medina, "but suppose it is a slow poison, which destroys little by little, health and beauty—"

The fright redoubled among the ladies.

"And if one should not experience the effects," continued the duchess, far from being re-assured, "until a month—three months!"

"Till ten years," cried Ludovic, laughing.

But his pleasantry was very badly received. Their fears became all the greater that some one had observed, and even the ladies were agreed on it, that the ladies who had received the bouquets were all really very pretty, an observation which excited their terror more than it flattered their vanity.

In vain Fernand, in order to re-assure them, reminded them that the plot went back to a period somewhat distant; that it had been first directed against the men; that the first attempts dated from the Opera Ball and the black domino; that the latter was small; that the Russian Princess was large; and that before assaying a complaint to the *Procureur General* (as they appeared inclined to do) it would be necessary to satisfy themselves, as well as him, of the facts and of the identity of the persons.

These words restored a slight calm to the assembly It was decided that before taking any extreme measure they should proceed to an inquiry; that each of those interested, gentlemen and ladies, should seek among his, or her, circle of acquaintances and relatives the most minute information, and that afterwards they would have another meeting to hear the different reports, which would doubtless throw some light upon the subject. The next re-union was fixed

for Thursday of mid-Lent, at the same place, the duchess's, where the confederates were to pass the evening.

The sitting adjourned, and the assembly dispersed in great agitation, a prey to the liveliest curiosity, especially on the ladies' side.

This curiosity only increased for everything irritated it and nothing happened to satisfy it.

Information secured in regard to the Princess Lazowkoff proved that she had left Paris fifteen days before the minister's ball without making any farewell visits, obliged, as was also her husband, to return to Saint Petersburgh immediately, by order of her sovereign. It was scarcely probable that upon going away she had left a power of attorney with anyone to intrigue with the gentleman at the Opera ball or to send poisoned bouquets to the ladies. So the latter commenced to feel reassured in regard to their lives, but they were far from being satisfied yet for they still had an ardent and continuous fever, that of unsatisfied curiosity. They had all gone separately to Fleurette, whom they had questioned in regard to the slightest details, and she had responded with great *naivete* that the day of the ball a very pretty and distinguished looking lady, apparently bright and intelligent, had asked for fifteen bouquets of *Alpestris Stella* at the same time placing fifteen one-hundred-franc notes on the counter. And the ladies, with exclamations of astonishment, had said to her:

"Had you ever seen her before?"

"Never."

"Would you recognize her if you saw her again."

"Certainly."

"And who carried the flowers to her carriage?"

"I did."

"What was the color of her carriage, horses, and livery?"

"It was a hackney-coach."

"Ah!" cried the ladies, "every precaution was taken."

This little history, repeated by Fleurette two or three times a-day, profited the ladies little but the flower-girl very much. She thus became acquainted with duchesses and marchionesses, whom she amused by her chatter, flattered by her compliments, and interested by her prettiness; each,

before departing, left an order of some kind, and promised Fleurette her patronage for the future.

"Only," they would say to her, "take a more convenient shop, one more public and more comfortable.

"Oh! to have the honor of receiving you, madame," she replied to each, with a graceful courtesy, "one would not hesitate—even to ruin one's self."

The gentlemen on their side did not leave off coming to Fleurette's. They took their turns in questioning her in regard to the lady of the domino. To them her answers were vaguer; but it was very seldom that at the end of a few minutes they did not leave the subject of the black domino to talk to her of herself only. Thus, far from injuring her affairs, this adventure had brought her in contact with all the greatest and most influential personages of Parisian society. In place of creating enemies each day brought her new friends.

The history of the *Stars* had created an immense sensation, above all since the fears of the ladies and the public malignancy had believed they therein saw a menace and a commencement of a criminal process. This hope was unfortunately unfulfilled; but, as Fleurette had foreseen, the interest of curiosity still existed, for the *denoûment* was not yet known.

Meanwhile the anecdote was related in all its details; the name of Fleurette was mixed up in it, incidentally and secondarily it is true. No matter! the name was pronounced, the world knew it, repeated it, and little by little she became the fashion.

As to the affair of the bouquets, Fleurette was completely indifferent to whatever might come of it. The effect was produced; and, certain that no one would betray a secret she alone knew, she disturbed herself little about the rest.

Such was not the case with the great ladies, who considered it a point of honor to discover the secret. They attached all the more importance to it because each day it became more inexplicable: and one should have seen the air of consternation expressed by the different groups assembled in the *salons* of the duchess de Medina on Thursday of mid-Lent when, after the report of each associate, it was clearly evident that no one had discovered anything and

that in all probability no one ever would. And then to see with what irritation and ill-humor the ladies received the reasons tending to prove the futility of further search.

"Renounce it; never!" said they.

And in their anger they loudly accused the zeal and intelligence of their friends, and, in a lower tone the devotion of their lovers, who had never known *them* to give the satisfaction which they now exacted.

At last, in her impatience and desire for success, the duchess de Medina cried out:

"Are there no longer any knights? To him who proves himself one by triumphing I will grant as a recompense whatever price he demands."

"Even a kiss?" cried Fernand.

"Even two!" replied the duchess.

This prospect re-animated their courage and inflamed all their hearts.

"Here is my plan," said the duke d'Olona. "The little black domino who has flirted with us all, gentlemen, and who, I may say, has mystified us—"

The gentleman all nodded assent to this statement.

"Has up to the present escaped all our researches, but I do not yet despair of discovering her."

A murmur of approbation arose from the ladies.

"Who knows? to day is Thursday of mid-Lent, the night of the last masked ball of the year, the last time she will be able to enjoy by herself our disappointment and her own triumph; and, despite the prudence which warns her to avoid us, she will perhaps find it difficult to resist the temptation of following and listening to us.

"If she meets us she certainly will not carry the ordinary signal, she has too much sense for that; but a gesture, a mistake, a chance may betray her to us, and then—"

"What will you do?" cried the duchess.

"We will surround her and not lose sight of her again, should we have to follow her like her shadow all night; so that at no matter what hour she leaves the ball, and at the very moment she puts her foot in the street, we will be able to capture her and carry her off!"

"Bravo!" cried the ladies.

"With every regard due to a lady of high rank; but,"

continued he in a chivalric voice, "I swear I will carry her off whoever may be her defenders. And the beautiful unknown shall be conducted to my house, where you have all agreed to sup to-night."

"Bravo!" repeated the ladies.

"And at dessert we will have the climax of the adventure."

The applause redoubled.

"So then," said Fernand," you all promise to sup with me at five o'clock?"

The ladies extended their hands.

"I receive your promises," continued Fernand; "and now, gentlemen, let us depart; it is already late and, not seeing her victims arrive, the little domino may take her departure."

Each wended his way separately to the Opera House. The duke took with him his body-servant, Morillo, an intelligent and adroit Brazilian. On the way he gave him his instructions.

Fernand's previsions were not altogether devoid of justice. Great ladies are not the only ones who are curious. Fleurette was also. She greatly wished to know what the duke, whom she had not seen for some time, thought of her and of the adventure. Was she forgotten or detested by him? Perhaps she preferred this last hypothesis, since, to tell the truth, his friendship and esteem were not indifferent to her, and she recalled with pleasure all he had said to her, and above all what he had done for her.

"Thursday of mid-Lent," she frequently repeated to herself during the day, "he ought to go to the Opera ball, it is the last one; he *will* go. If I could only go also!"

She stopped herself, saying: "That would be absurd; I must not think of it!"

But she kept on thinking of it, nevertheless, and commenced reasoning thus:

"Where is the danger? I could go in a plain black domino—there are so many! no one would recognize me. I would not wear the flower he knows so well. If it is necessary I will not even speak to him; but if I see him I will follow him and listen, he is not very reticent, and so I will know all he thinks."

She raised a few objections and engaged in a few struggles with herself, in order to have the air of defending herself, but she had already decided, and after a few last capitulations of conscience she occupied herself only with her toilet.

At one o'clock she was at the Opera ball. For an hour she saw no one she knew; but a secret presentiment told her that the duke would come at the usual time and place, as if a magnetic instinct had made known to her that he would await her there.

She was not deceived.

CHAPTER VI.

At a quarter past two o'clock Fernand left his carriage at the entrance of the Opera House, and, followed by Morillo, to whom he did not speak and who appeared not to know him, he mounted the grand stairway, traversed the lobby and arrived at the fire-place as the half hour sounded.

Many masks were seated about. Only one gave a start at sight of him. Fernand remarked it and, with a silent motion, pointed out the mask to Morillo who, according to his instructions, placed himself behind the one indicated. Fernand turned towards the fire and, while pretending to warm his feet, attentively regarded in the mirror over the mantel the little black domino to whom his back was turned.

To-night he was in ordinary evening dress, and unmasked, and was accosted by a friend who was not in the plot, a neutral power who ought to inspire less distrust.

"*You* at the Opera ball my dear duke! I understand you come on account of the beautiful unknown you spoke to me of."

"Oh, no," said the duke, laughing, "it is no longer a question of her."

He looked in the glass while saying this and believed he saw the little domino make a slight movement.

"Ah! it is a pity after what you told me; she has so much spirit."

"That is true—but she had good reason to wear a mask."

The movement of the domino became more marked.

"Why?" continued the other.

"Why?"—for an excellent reason," replied the duke, watching the little domino still more closely, "it is because she is horribly ugly."

An indignant movement barely missed bursting forth, from the domino but was instantly repressed.

"Ah! she is ugly!" repeated his friend, "I can understand that that alters the case, and how did you find it out?"

"I have seen her as plain as I see you."

"It is not true!" cried a clear and vibrating little voice, with an involuntarily energetic accent.

The duke turned around, but the little domino, comprehending her imprudence, was already launched in the crowd and, in an instant, was lost to his sight. She believed herself safe; it was not so. Morillo, standing behind her, had traced with a piece of chalk a white mark on her shoulder, and was following in her track.

In spite of the crowd which frequently separated them he did not lose sight of the fugitive, or, if he did, always soon regained it, thanks to the accusing sign she carried with her and which constantly revealed her presence.

Fleurette, thinking that the duke followed her, hastened to quit the lobby; but vainly did she throw herself into the ball, into the very midst of the *melée*, into the centre of the thickest groups of dancers; in vain did she disappear in the lobbies and dark corridors; nothing discouraged the incessant and inveterate pursuit of her enemy. Once she entered a box in the first tier, and waited; he waited also, and as soon as she dared venture out he again followed her. At this moment, as he was descending, behind her, the stairway leading from the first tier, he encountered Fernand and some friends.

"Return home," said Morillo rapidly and in a low voice to his master in passing him; "now, monseigneur, I will answer for success."

And, ardent huntsman, he again threw himself on the track of the frightened hind he was pursuing.

It was late. Fleurette, who for a long half-hour had cowered in a stall, behind which Morrilo was seated pretending to be asleep, raised her head, threw a rapid glance around, and, not seeing anyone she knew nor any figure she suspected, at last decided to depart.

The crowd was still immense and she found difficulty in opening herself a passage to the stairway of exit, a circumstance which served her projects and also those of Morillo, who followed her so closely that his hands almost touched her domino and his breath moved the strings of her hood. Fleurette at last arrived in the grand vestibule. Morillo had calculated that one of the great lady's servant would be in waiting with her carriage, behind which he hoped to mount, or, if that was impossible he counted upon his Brazilian legs for following or distancing the best horses. But Fleurette had no equipage, no horses.

It was horrible weather. Rain, falling in torrents, had succeeded the snow; it was impossible for a feminine foot to hazard itself in the street without being buried in the mud, so the little black domino, without hesitating or being at all dismayed, hastily quitted the vestibule and turned to the left towards the glazed corridor which led from the sestibule to the *cue Dronat*, a much liked by pedesrians and through which people who had neither lackeys nor carriages went to seek a cab for themselves. This was what Fleurette bravely undertook to do, to the great astonishment of her faithful satellite, who arrived at the end of the passage at the same time as herself without being remarked or even perceived, owing to the enormous crowd of masks and dominos who desiring to return home without getting wet, cried out, called cabs, and disputed with all who successively appeared at the entrance of the passage.

Amid the rain, cries, and disputes, poor Fleurrette had great difficulty in making her voice heard. In vain did she cry to each carriage that appeared: "Here, coachman, here; it is my turn." Other competitors, louder-voiced and stronger-handed, stopped the conducter, opened the cab-door, helped in the ladies, young or old, whose escorts they were and, when there was no more room inside in spite of the rain seated themselves beside the coachman who con-

veyed them the best he could. That was the horse's business.

A public coupé arrived at the passage door; five or six already disputed over it and Fleurette would have had no chance nor any hope even this time of carrying it off from her rivals had not a man of a small figure, but strong and vigorous, with polished manners and an honest air, (it was Morillo) who stood near her rudely pushed aside the different aspirants, saying; "The carriage is retained by madame, who has waited a long time."

"Oh! sir, how much I thank you," gratefully said Fleurette.

"Get in madame, get in quick," said the man, opening the door.

And without urging Fleurette rapidly entered the coupé.

"Where does madame wish to be taken asked the Brazilian, with curiosity, holding the carriage door half-open.

"On the bouevlard, to the right," prudently answered, Fleurette; "I will stop the coachman when it is necessary. —Thanks, sir."

And the door was closed.

At last, after an evening so agitated and so full of incidents, Fleurette found herself alone: she could breathe freely and reflect. Overcome with fatigue, she allowed herself to fall back in the carriage and did not remark that the man with the honest appearance had quickly placed himself beside the driver, to whom he spoke in low and rapid voice. She was awakened from her rerery by an unusal fact; the hired horse which conducted her was going so fast that he passed all the private carriages which had preceded him.

She lowered the glass and called to the coachman:

"Where are you going?"

He made no other reply than to whip up his horse.

"Stop! this is not the way."

The same silence, and redoubled blows of the whip. Fleurette then preceived that the coachman was not alone on his seat. Far from frightening her, this reasured her; for if the coachman was drunk, as everything indicated, she would have some one to defend her. So it was to her protector that she now addressed herself asking him to order the driver to stop. He, having his back to her, did not, or ap-

peared not, to hear; on the contrary he seemed to accelerate with gestures the already rapid gait of the horse, who appeared not to relish this sudden change in his habits.

Fleurette was not easily frightened; but this persistance in not answering her began to alarm her. The rain seemed to fall as it had never fallen before, and the boulevard had became, as usual, a lake of thick yellow mud frightful to pedestrians. It was, besides, owing to the rapidity of the carriage, impossible to dream of jumping out without sustaining great injury. She looked through the window; she was in the centrail boulevard and already opposite the Madeline; the coupé turned to the right into the faubourg Saint Honoré, just then crowded with carriages although the hour was so late.

On the right and left sides of the road stood brilliant mansions with open entrances, allowing a whole world of porters and valets in livery to be seen.

Fleurette, putting her head out of the window, was about to call for help when the coupé, quitting the street, turned all at once to the left, and so suddently that it barely missed overturning. That was nothing. At full gallop it entered the court yard of a magnificent mansion and the gates were immediatly closed after it. The carriage stopped; Fleurette jumped out and found herself face to face with the honest man whose aid had procured her the coupé. He saluted her with respect and offered her his hand which she repulsed.

"Sir, what does this mean? such an unheard of proceeding?"

"Simply madame an invitaion to supper."

"Answer me, sir, "said she angrily," where am I?"

"At the house of a person who waits supper for you, and who has gotten up a grand fête in order to present you to his numerous guests."

"There is a mistake, I am not expected anywhere," said she quickly, "let me go."

"Impossible, before supper; afterwards, I can not say; that will depend on my master."

"Ah! you have a master! I wish to speak to him," she cried instantly

"At your orders, madame," responded he, bowing. "I am about to have the honor of conducting you to him."

He went before and led her through appartments splendidly lighted up, galleries, *salons* and boudoirs in which shone every marvel of luxury and art. But she paid no attention to the rich carpets under her feet, the walls resplendent in gold and marble, nor the treasures of sculpture and painting which on all sides presented themselves; she saw nothing, so great were her impatience and anger. At last Morillo stopped before a door which after knocking at it discreetly, he opened, and ushered Fleurette into a bed-chamber deliciously furnished. This apartment, which was situated at one end of the house and looked upon the gardens, was lit by a single lamp placed on a table.

Near this table, at one corner of the fire-place, a man was seated, his back turned to the door, reading a book.

"Your grace," said the Brazilian respectfully, "here is the captive I promised you."

The duke quickly arose; Fleurette uttered a cry and, staggering, supported herself against a piece of furniture; she recognized the duke d'Olona.

CHAPTER VII.

On receiving a signal from his master the servant retired. Fernand advanced towards the black domino and contemplated her for a moment in silence; but, seeing her tremble and with difficulty keep herself up, the pleasure of the revenge he had promised himself was partly dissipated. He offered her his hand, which she silently accepted, conducted her to the corner of the fire-place, installed her in an easy chair, and, standing opposite to her, said slowly:

"Whatever desire I may have to know who is the person who has so maliciously and perseveringly trifled with us all, the respect I owe a woman, even my enemy, prevents my seeking to lift this mask; please then, madame to take it off yourself, and show me your features."

The little domino, as if overcome with confusion, lowered her head and made no reply.

"I am ignorant who you are, madame," continued the duke: "but the state in which I see you at present, the terror you experience at being known tells me sufficently well that your name and rank are such as may not be compromised with impunity. Please, then, listen to me."

"You have seriously wounded, for what purpose we will soon know, the vanity of young gentleman who seldom pardon and, above all, great ladies, your rivals or friends, who never forgive."

"In an hour," he continued, looking at the clock on the mantel," they will all be here; they come to take supper with me expecting to find you here, for I have promised them to deliver you over to their kindness to-night, and I always keep my promises. Then your fate will be in their hands; as yet it is in mine only."

"Come, reflect," said he in a voice which, in spite of himself, became kinder, "it is I whom you have most cruelly offended; it is I, fair mask, with whom you have trifled the most unworthily, and yet I imagine that it would be better for you to trust to me, to my sternness, than to the clemency of the ladies. Meanwhile, you may choose."

All through this address the domino remained silent, but one could see that she hesitated, and that a struggle was going on within her.

"I am afraid," continued the duke, smiling, "that my clients may be pitiless, and they really have a right to call you to account: I, who have less of reveng and even of vanity at heart, for my part feel that your former offences are more than expiated—by your present sufferings."

"I shall never forgive myself," faid he, seeing the quick throbbing of her bosom, which stirred the ribbons of her domino, "at having made a woman tremble; much more, to have seen her trembling without seeking to reasure her."

"Let me see," he continued, with ineffable good will, "tell me whether, without betraying the interests of my clients. I cannot serve yours, and whether, thanks to me, this supper which has commenced by a declaration of war may not end in a treaty of peace. Confide in me, tell me what I can say, what I can do, to save a great lady such as you,

to extenuate, to justify your actions, and you will find that in place of an enemy you will have in me only a friend."

Fleurette tore off her mask, and threw herself at the duke's feet. He hastened to raise her, and, regarding her features in the light of the lamps for a moment, he cried out:

Fleurette!—Fleurette, *the flower girl!*" he repeated with shout of laughter. "Yes, indeed; it is she, I recognize her. "Oh! *what* an adventure, and what a charming supper we shall have."

"How, monsieur!" said Fleurette, "what do you mean?"

"Eh, *parbleu!*" he gaily replied, "I mean to deliver the culprit to her judges, I have sworn it, and since it is not a great lady, since the adventure compromises nobody—"

"And *I*, sir?" cried Fleurette in distress.

"*You*, my child? you have wished it, you have merited it. To think of mystifying people who have never done anything to you, and to take for the object of a carnival joke all the leaders of Parisian society. And if all you get for a punishment is a little confusion, where will be the harm?"

"It is true, it is true, I deserve to be punished; but if I am lost, forever lost will not the punishment be much greater than the fault?"

She then related to him how, alone in the world, poor and without resources, she had had the idea of advertising, and gaining custom for her flower-stand. She acknowledged that the ruse employed by her, coming from a young girl might appear bold and audacious; but, after all, she had, like many others, speculated on the vanity and self-esteem of handsome young men who flattered themselves by thinking to find in her the conquest of some great lady. As to her flowers, she forced no one to buy them, and she had refused, as he knew in the case of himself and Ludovic, the exaggerated price which love, curiosity and pride had frequently urged upon her.

"I was wrong," she continued, "I did not think of the results of such a ruse; and I do not doubt that this ought to excite your indignation, *monsieur le duc*, and also that of the noble ladies to whose vengence you have sworn to abandon me. Do it then; you have the right and the power

but if a poor girls happiness is necessary to enliven your supper; if, in disclosing my secret to them, you deliver me up to all their railleies; if, in addition, the ridicule and disclosure of this scene takes the custom of these great ladies away from me and withdraws, forever, the rich patronage they have commenced to give me; and if, finally, it is all over with my humble fortune and future, will you have nothing to reproach yourself with *monsieur le duc?*"

"I!" responded Fernand haughtily, and yet a little moved in spite of herself.

"What chances remain, then," she continued, "I do not say to enrich herself, but simply to gain her living, to the poor girl who wishes to live honestly? And yet these elegant young gentlemen are pitiless, and blame me for having acted the coquette towards them; they would blame less, perhaps, had I gone further. They consider the flowers I have sold them a crime; yet they would not reproach me at all," cried she with energy, "they would approve of me, had I sold myself!"

While she was thus speaking the hood of her domino slipped off, her long hair became unloosened and fell over her shoulders, her manner was proud, her gestures noble, and her eyes animated; she was beautiful.

The duke had witnessed with astonishment not only the warmth of her speech, but also the art and address with which she had presented and arrayed all her method of defence.

"Fleurette," he replied, "you are a good advocate, but you have a bad cause. For a month you have fooled all our *salons* turned all our heads and excited everyone's curiosity with a talent which I recognize, with an address which I do not blame, but which has stimulated our own. It was a challenge, a contest: on your part, to guard your secret; on ours, to discover it, long sucessful, you are at last vanguished. It is the chance of war. For the ladies on our side the great prize of the battle is the key to the enigma, your secret, and nothing else; but they demand that first and above all."

"It would ruin me," she cried quickly; "and you *will not* disclose my secret?"

"What else can I do?"

"You can keep it to yourself. It is to you only I would have confided it."

"And my reputation for address and spirit?" said the duke smiling. "I have loudly boasted that I would discover this secret, and would have to acknowledge that I had completely failed; an acknowledgement always difficult to a young man's self-esteem.—But suppose it was not only a question of vanity in the present case—suppose it demanded a great and cruel sacrifice—"

"What does this mean?" asked Fleurette, alarmed.

"Oh! yes, certainly," replied the duke, seating himself near her, "you think only of yourself, Fleurette: but if I should tell you that in case I discovered this secret, the object of so many desires, a great lady had promised me a kiss, two kisses even, and if this great lady should be the one I love, or at least the one whom I have for along time assiduously courted, how can you come, when I am about seeing the fruition of all my desires, and exact this sacrifice and force me to renounce my dearest hopes?"

Fleurette hung her head.

"What have you done for me?" he continued you have played with me, laughed at me, baffled me! In exchange for my affection and submissiveness to your orders what have you given me? What have you promised me? Nothing? and you demand!—Come, Fleurette," he said in a sweet and supplicating voice, "is this just?"

A quick blush covered the young girl's forehead. As if seeking to conceal it she started to raise the hood which had fallen on her shoulders. The duke prevented her and took hold of her hand.

"Answer me," said he. "Will you at least promise to indemnify me for what I lose?"

He was almost on his knees to her; one of his hands held Fleurette's the other was around her waist, and, with an accent which was almost irresistible, he cried:

"Speak, Fleurette, and I will believe you! speak, and I will obey you! Only one word: a great lady's love—will you repay me for it?"

Fleurette arose quickly. Her cheeks and lips were pale, her heart beat violently. Was it with indignation? No one can tell: but she disengaged her hand from Fernand's, proudly raised her head, and said:

"No, no; if I can only obtain mercy at that price, I no longer ask for it. I had believed the duke d'Olona to be sufficiently generous to pardon me unconditionally. I was deceived. So you can deliver me, *monsieur le duc*, to this great lady whose love my ruin may serve to purchase; it cannot amount to much if you can only buy it at such a price and if it comes to you through caprice alone."

There was a touch of anger, of irony almost of jealousy, in her voice.

"What do you say?" cried Fernand, regarding her with as much surprise as emotion.

"I say, *monsieur le duc*," she continued, with bitterness. "that in my opinion a love thus offered is not worth as much as the friendship of a poor girl, however humble and miserable she may be, a friendship like mine, for instance!"

"Ah!" she cried earnestly, "if you were acquainted with me you would know how much gratitude for a service, how much devotion for a benefit I can feel. That devotion, *monsieur le duc*, you can acquire now and forever. You will never be in want of joyous suppers or beautiful mistresses, your gold will always give them to you; but a devoted heart is sent by God alone, and when it is presented to you do not disdain it."

There was a mixture of firmness, resignation, and tenderness in her voice which went straight to Fernand's heart. When she ceased speaking he made no response, but his resolution was taken.

"Replace your mask," he said.

Fleurette hastily obeyed. Fernand rang. Morillo appeared.

"You will re-conduct *madame la marquise* to the first carriage in waiting:"

"Yes, your grace."

"Does anyone know how she arrived here?"

"Yes, your grace."

"No one must ever know how she has left. See well to it."

"Yes your grace."

Fernand opened a door concealed by the tapestry. It led to a consevatory which had a door of it's own opening on the street. The Brazilian passed first into the conserva-

tory in order to show Fleurette the way. She left alone with Fernand, seized his hand and carried it to her lips.

"Ah! this is a noble action, monsieur," said she in a low voice, "and Fleurette, the poor flower-girl, will never forget it." And she disappeared.

The clock struck five; numerous carriages were entering the large courtyard of his mansion, as Fernand, his heart full of an inexpressible contentment, rubbed his hands and said to himself: "I will remember the Thursday of mid-Lent. Never, I believe, have I felt so happy!"

Meanwhile the confederates male and female, had arrived in a mass, faithful to the *rendez-vous* and already filled the *salons*. The joy was great and the news excellent, for Ludovic and the other other young men had returned from the Opera and announced that success was certain, that Morillo answered for it, and the servant, of the house, when interrogated by the ladies, had assured them that a little black domino, who had arrived in a carriage with Morillo, had been conducted by him into the cabinet of monseigneur.

"Victory!" cried the feminine party of the assembly.

"Victory!" repeated all the others.

The guests were assembled and the supper was ready: they only waited for the master of the house to commence. He alone was late, he only was wanting at the *rendez-vous*. A door opens. It is he at last. Huzza greets his entrance, premature cries of joy and chants of triumph arise but are soon checked by the depressed air of their champion.

"What is it? what is the matter?" cried all the ladies, who surrounded Fernand on all sides like so many interrogation points.

"Has not your enemy been captured?"

"Yes, indeed; ladies."

"Has she not been brought here?"

"Oh! yes."

"Well! and who is she? her name? You know it?"

"Not yet, ladies."

"Then let her come in, let her appear, said the men."

"That we may tear off her mask," cried the women.

"Impossible, ladies," said d'Olona sadly, almost inconceivable, incredible and wonderful thing has just occurred. It is like magic, or sorcery."

"Indeed!" cried the ladies impatiently. "Go on, duke."

"You know, madame," said Fernand, addressing the beautiful duchess, "that Morillo, my devoted servant, had managed, with an address which I shall never be able to sufficiently recompense, to carry off the magic domino from the Opera ball and to bring her here. He conducted his prisoner to my study, where he locked her in, and brought me the key of the door. I went there, my heart palpitating with joy on your account, duchess, thinking of the recompense you had promised me. I found no one. I sought everywhere, but there was not the least trace of the prisoner, who had disappeared, vanished!"

"It is impossible!"

"It is as I tell you; and the most extraordinary thing about it all was that there was nothing broken; the doors and windows were fastened with iron bars which were found intact in their places. The servants in the ante-chamber heard no noise. The concierge carefully closed the gates immediately after the arrival of the domino and since then has seen no one leave the place either on foot or in a carriage. After all this, if the progress of intelligence in the present enlightened age did not forbid us the only explanation possible, I would swear that our enemy is decidedly a sorceress."

"Do you really think so?" said the ladies, frightened.

"It has every appearance of it. But come and see for yourselves, ladies."

"The ladies and gentlemen, armed with lights, precipitated themselves into the duke's cabinet; everything, even the book-cases and closets, was examined and ransacked; but the invasion produced nothing, except a general disorder which it took two days to repair.

The supper was excellent, but sorrowful. Even the popping of the champagne corks and the laughter had a mournful ring. It has not been told whether the duchesse de Medina was generous enough to accord as a consolation for defeat that which she had promised as a recompense for victory.

Henceforth they might as well give up trying to discover the mysterious unknown; but they spoke of her for a long time afterwards in their salons, every one, and the duke d'Olona always among the first, losing himself in conjectures,

each one more romantic and ingenious than the others; and in the end the anecdote of the *rhododendrum ferrugineum* remained, like the mystery of the iron mask, among the number of historical facts not yet cleared up.

The next day, by mid-day, the duke had left his house on foot. He walked along dreamily, intending to take a promenade in the *Champs-Elysee*, but he soon found himself orpposite the Opera Arcade.

CHAPTER VIII.

Some weeks after the important events we have just described there arose a shop, or rather an elegant conservatory, on the Madeleine boulevard, before which the passers by stopped and into which entered all the fashionable world of both sexes. It was the fashion. That was the principal reason, but there were other good ones also.

In the first place it was situated in a new quarter, erected as if by enchantment upon the gardens of the former mansion of Foreign Affairs; a superb quarter near the commencement of the *Champs-Elysee*, and all the carriages going to the *bois de Boulogne* by way of that boulevard stopped before the shop of Fleurette, the flower-girl, who, after deep and intelligent calculations, had chosen this site.

Then the conservatory was decorated with an exquisite taste and always garnished with the rarest and most beautiful flowers; and small spouting fountains kept up a perennial freshness. Carpets of verdure rejoiced the sight; mirrors, arranged with art along the walls and partly concealed by the foliage, produced unforseen and charming effects. They permitted ladies while purchasing bouquets to contemplate their toilets and figures, twenty times repeated amidst the flowers; an attention to which not one was insensible.

Behind the conservatory was a small *salon* with a white marble mantle, a handsome clock, commodious and comfort-

able furniture, and a thick and warm carpet. This was Fleurette's own parlor; in the front apartment she received her customers, in this only her friends, of whom she had many. She had known how to gain them, and, which is still more difficult how to keep them.

Seated beside her at the counter, or occuping it alone in her absence, one generally saw a young woman about twenty-five years old, formerly beautiful, and who seemed in her new position to have recommenced a new beauty and youth. This person was Michelette, her former companion and Etienne's sister. Fleurette had not forgotten her, and as soon as she was able to employ an assistant had sent for her; and had given her what the poor girl had never before known; ease, contentment and happiness.

The duke d'Olona had kept his word faithfully. He had told no one, not even the duchess, Fleurette's secret; he never betrayed it and, perfect gentleman that he was, never let anyone suspect that he knew it.

Fleurette, who now found herself rich and who became richer every day, believed that at last had arrived the time favorable for realising the project she had so long meditated upon. She was in business for herself, had become one of the leading Parisian florists, and from that period commenced the new and generous enterprise which had become the dream of her life.

"Everything has succeeded with me up to the present," said she, "'though my own welfare is not the only thing in question; and will not the good God also protect me when a sacred duty is involved?" And every night in going over the cash with Michelette she deducted from her profits which were considerable, a portion which she carefully laid aside.

"Why?" Michelette would inquire, but Fleurette never answered.

"The other portion," continued Michelette, embracing her, "is in part for me, I know, and for yourself and the rest for business expenses; but this—what is it put aside for?"

"To pay my debts."

"But you haven't any."

"Yes, indeed, I have," said Fleurette, laughing and very large ones."

Then she would lock up her gold, saying to herself

"Oh! my god-mother, this is your share!"

She had really conceived the project of making a dowry for her noble god-mother, Clotilde de Kéroualle; a very modest one, doubtless, but which after all would prevent her having to enter a convent.

This project, as one may imagine, she had confided to no one; in spite of, or perhaps because of, its improbability it was a source of happiness to her which she carefully kept to herself, and which she alone could understand. Every Sunday, for instance she would lock herself in her chamber to count over her god-mother's fortune.

Etienne, under the pretext of visiting his sister, occasionally came to see Fleurette whom he still loved, but now that she lived in a palace of flowers he felt that she was no longer a sweet-heart for him; he could beat her no more. Luckily he could still get drunk and, under the pretence of forgetting his love, he gave himself up to his passion for drink, from which vice neither the advice of Fleurette nor the affection of his sister could save him.

Among the number of fashionable young men who were clients of Fleurette was Ludovic, who, in spite of himself, had resumed his former chains and, while regarding this love as beneath him, gave himself entirely up to it with an ardor which commenced to alarm the ex-court jeweller, madam Durussel.

Ludovic's passion had more than ever redoubled and turned to frenzy since the assiduous presence of the duke d'Olona who almost daily stopped his carriage before Fleurette's door, got out, entered the shop, purchased a bouquet and, after having remained two or three minutes, departed. Soon he remained five minutes, then ten, and then a quarter of an hour. He took a great interest in the conversation of the young girl who received without astonishment or embarrassment the honor he did her, and of which any other would have been proud; she treated him like her other customers, perhaps with less ceremony, a distinction which was not without a certain charm; the others were purchasers, he was a friend!

Coquettish with others, she was not so with him; that would have been to do him an injury. He deserved better than that. Simple and frank, she received him with joy,

did not conceal the pleasure she had in seeing him, and not seek to detain him; that might have annoyed him. So he never went away without regret, and was charmed by her gaiety, her prattle, her intelligence, and above all by the mute expression of a sincere sentiment, that he alone understood, and, which in her manners, eyes, and least actions seemed to say: "I have promised friendship, I keep my word."

At first, owing to the duke's frequent visits, Ludovic and all the other young Club dandies had said: "Fleurette is his mistress;" but in the free manner, friendly and almost intimate, he indulged in towards her there was so marked an evidence of esteem and respect that it was necessary for them to renounce their first idea, and so they could make nothing of it.

Undoubtedly Flurette greatly pleased him and he found her charming; he proclaimed it everywhere; and as no one had ever yet resisted him, and as Fleurette did not seem sufficiently ferocious to be the first one to commence such a resistance, it was evident, so said the world, that the young duke had but to speak to gain her. But this time the world was mistaken.

Fleurette, through her simplicity or innately, was a coquette and had the undefinable art of attracting confidence. She never demanded it, it was always given to her.

We have said that the duke often remained with her ten minutes or a quarter of an hour; and one day half an hour had flown by without his thinking of departing; his carriage, horses, and servants were awaiting him on the boulevard in front of Fleurerte's shop.

"I am compromising you," said he smiling.

"That is true; I never thought of it."

"Ah!" cried he joyously, "that word will prevent my leaving."

"On the contrary, *monsieur le duc*; for now that you have called my attention to it you must go."

The duke left, but frequently looked back as he was going out. He had remarked that in the middle of the day there were always a great many fashionable people, principally ladies, at Fleurette's; but that by five or six o'clock they had returned to their promenades or their homes, and

were occupied with some great affair, or their toilets and no longer thought of the flower-girl, whose shop, at this hour of the day, was not yet lit up. So for some days the duke's carriage regularly arrived between five and six. Saluting Michelette, who was behind the counter Fernand would enter the little *salon* at the back of the shop where Fleurette ordinarily rested herself after the days labors.

Seated together before the fire-place they would then converse with each other; and as a result of the secret influence of which we just now spoke or from some other cause not yet explained it would be the great nobleman who related his affairs to the little florist. And, frequently, without waiting for him to ask for it she permitted herself to give him advice, advice which he nearly always followed.

With his position, rank, and fortune, the duke was the aim of many great coquettes who contended for him from pride, ambition and rivalry; amorous intrigues in which he found everything but love. We have said that he loved women passionately, adoringly, and above everything; it was the sole occupation of his life. So one can understand how he had neither the strength nor the courage to decline their advances, which touched his vanity rather than his heart, and just now he found himself boldly carrying on three or four intrigues not one of which really charmed him. On the other hand there was not one of them that was not a source of embarrassment, of false promises, of weariness, or of regret; not one which did not lead to scenes of reproach, tears and jealousy; and in the end there was neither repose nor liberty for him. He lived in a state of gilded slavery, held by chains of flowers which he was anxious to break but which honor and the behavior, or rather beauty, of his mistresses joined to his own weakness prevented his breaking.

This was his life. Frequently Fleurette pitied him, but oftener she laughed at him.

"Ah! you laugh!" he would indignantly cry out.

"At an unhappiness which is not genuine; but, after all, if it amuses you—"

"No," he would answer impatiently, "it tires me to death."

At this Fleurette would laugh still more heartily.

"Yes," he would wrathfully go on, "nothing pleases these fashionable idols but insignificance and frivolity. They haven't two ideas in succession; it is impossible to converse with them like I do with you."

"I! *monsieur le duc*, I listen, that is all. It is a pleasure—not a merit."

"No no, you flatterer. You are intelligent, as you know very well, and more than that you have good sense, and reasoning powers," he added, smiling, "that are really appalling."

"Oh! pshaw!"

For a moment or two he silently regarded her, and then said:

"Haven't you yet perceived, Fleurette, the ascendency you have acquired over me?"

"No; but thank you for letting me know it; I will use it."

"By Jove! you have already commenced. You have at least twenty times made fun of my livery. You found it too gorgeous, too showy—"

"And in bad taste. When one is as rich as you one should affect simplicity."

"Very well, that is understood," he abruptly responded. "If you will look out of doors you will see that my livery has been changed."

"That is right," tranquilly said Fleurette.

"And Campador, my favorite horse, who pleased all Paris, and the one I usually ride; he was so elegant and impetuous, and yet he did not please you—"

"He would have broken your neck."

"You took a dislike to him, in short detested him and found him frightful; and I who formerly cared so much for him, became little by little disgusted with him, without knowing why, and finished this morning by getting rid of him."

Fleurette uttered a cry of pleasure, and with a movement as rapid as thought took the duke's hand as if to thank him. Fernand could not help feeling touched at this exhibition of affection, so sincere and disinterested, and warmly pressed the hand she had given him.

"Well," said Fleurette, without seeking to withdraw

her hand, "that which you have done with your favorite horse—"

She stopped and smiled.

"Well!—go on."

"You must also do—with *all* your favorites! That is my advice."

"All right," replied Fernand, sinking back into his arm-chair; "I will follow it if I have the courage, or rather if some one I know would give me the courage in giving me better advice; herself, for instance."

"Bah!" replied Fleurette, also leaning back in her chair." I understood! *monsieur le duc*, that we had given up all those ideas."

"*You* doubtless; but *I, never!* The more I see you, the more pleasant they are to me."

"That is impossible," said she gaily. "You love regular beauties, Grecian ones, and I have only an irregularly pretty face and a Parisian figure. You love antique profiles and I have a snub-nose; a young one, it is true, which is its only merit. In addition to it I have nothing, absolutely nothing."

While speaking she lay extended in her chair, and warmed her feet with the negligence and unceremoniousness of one who was at home.

"In the first place," said the duke slowly and admiringly, "you have a very pretty foot and ankle."

"What does that prove?" asked she with an indifferent air.

"That proves," said he with vivacity, "that you are charming! If you would love me, Fleurette, it would change my whole existence, it would add to my life—"

"One more embarrassment, and you have so many already. It is for my friendship to diminish, not to increase, them.—Stop! *monseigneur*," said she with emotion and assuming a serious tone, "let us not speak of that, let us *never* speak of it."

"So be it," said the duke coldly. "One question only; do you love anyone else?"

"I know of no one," she answered abruptly. "Why do you ask?"

"For this reason; whoever he may be, I wish to make

him, not happy, for he is already that," said he, regarding her kindly, "but rich enough for you to marry him at once and find with him the happiness you deny to me."

Fleurette thanked him with a grateful smile of recognition, and replied:

"Keep your gold, *monsieur le duc*, for I am in love with no one."

"You have the same antipathy for me, then," said he laughing, "that you have for my horse, Campéador; an innate one!"

"You don't believe it," said she reproachfully. "Of all I have seen you appear to be the least wicked. And," she continued, raising her eyes to his and describing him to himself, "you are not a fop, nor are you proud or pretentious. One frequently forgets while looking at you that you are handsome, and in listening to you that you are a great nobleman."

"Well then," cried Fernand, forgetting to thank her for the compliment, "what do you reproach me with."

"Many things. In the first place you are too rich."

"What difference does that make to you?"

"It would be believed that I had given myself to you for your gold, that I owed my fortune to you, and I only wish to owe it to myself," said she proudly.

"Well!" cried the duke gaily, "I will never give you anything, I swear! nothing!" and he added tenderly and seriously: "I will love you enough to do that."

Fleurette could not keep from smiling, and said:

"That is already something!"

"It is a great deal!" he quickly replied, "then the world can no longer say anything, nor you either; now are you persuaded, do you consent?"

"Not yet."

"What other objections have you?"

"I will perhaps tell them to you later on," said she rising, "You have no pity on your servants, who have been standing before my door for an hour."

"Don't be afraid," cried he, "no one will remark them, nor even see them. Thanks to you my livery is now so simple."

With these words he hastened out, and Fleurette remained for sometime plunged in a deep revery.

"It is singular," she said to herself, smiling sadly," he pretends that he loves me, and he does not love me! while *I*—" she did not finish, but the smile died away on her lips and tears glistened in her eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

That evening the shop was illuminated. Fleurette was behind the counter surrounded by customers, or rather adorers, Ludovic among others, of whose conversation she heard little. Perhaps she was thinking of what she had heard that morning, or perhaps only of her business affairs. It was Saturday, the day on which she counted over her profits, and on which she thought not so much of the good God as of his angels. A postman entered and handed her a letter which she opened with a careless air, but at the first words she read she turned pale, her hands trembled, she turned to the signature, uttered a cry, and hastened into her little *salon* in order to read it alone and at her ease.

"My god-mother!" said she, putting the letter to her lips and then on her heart, "my god-mother!"

It was indeed Clotilde de Kéroualle who had written to her god-child, and the latter, seeing the other's name, had forgotten everything else. She had not even thought of contradicting Ludovic, who had insinuated and was himself convinced that the letter she had just received was from the most adored of lovers. What did it matter? Fleurette cared little for the opinions of those who were indifferent to her, Clotilde wrote that she had just arrived in Paris, and that she would expect a visit from Fleurette on the following morning after Mass, for she wanted to see her and embrace her at the earliest moment possible—altogether a good and tender letter, and one in which, in a few lines, her god-mother faithfully depicted her beautiful character.

Fleurette did not sleep any that night, and, if she had dared, would have knocked at the doors of the mansion in

the *rue de Varennes* at daybreak. At last, at the appointed hour, she arrived.

She had so many things to relate to her god-mother and so many questions to ask her that the words became crowded together on her lips and she could say nothing, she could only embrace her. Then she gazed at her, remaining for some moments motionless, as if in an ecstasy. At that time Clotilde was in all the splendor of her beauty, joined to which was the most exquisite grace and an undefinable charm which reigned throughout her person. Her attentive kindness soon acquainted itself with the progress, studies, and welfare of her god-daughter.

On her side Fleurette thought only of her god-mother, her journey, and her condition. The last was unchanged. She still led a life of dependence and humiliation. She performed the duties of an ordinary governess less the salary and respect. Her young cousin saw in the daily lessons so generously given her only an annoyance which freed her from all gratitude. As to madame de Kéroualle there was the same barrenness of heart and manners. She had become so used to considering Clotilde as an attendant, and treating her as such that even Clotilde herself ended by forgetting she was of the same family, and no longer called the marquise "cousin;" which madame de Kéroualle took for a mark of deference and respect, and was actually pleased at it.

Madame de Kéroualle, who had married off her eldest daughter last year, had now the happiness to part with the second. A nobleman of her province, M. de Kervalec, who had been appointed a Receiver-General, had asked for her daughter Géraldine in marriage, and her dowry ought to serve to pay his security. In order to definitely arrange this affair, and one or two others which required the presence of the Kéroualle family at Paris, it had been decided that the marriage should be celebrated in the latter city, and this is how madame de Kéroualle, her son-in-law, daughters and cousin found themselves inhabiting for a month or two the house in the *rue de Varennes*.

The family mansion was accordingly just now less tiresome than usual; the coming marriage was the cause of a few dinner-parties, receptions and even balls, at which

Clotilde danced little but helped her cousins to dance, for it was she who played the piano, with a talent so remarkable that more than one dancer forgot what he was about while listening to the orchestra. M. de Kérvalec, the future son-in-law, had been accorded the right of coming to pay his court to madame de Kéroualle and his intended as often as was considered proper, which promised a succession of not very amusing *soirees* for Clotilde; although for to-morrow, Monday, in order to celebrate their arrival in Paris, M. de Kérvalec would have the gallantry to conduct the ladies to the Opera. He had taken a box of six seats in the first tier; and one of these seats, with which they did not know what else to do, had been graciously accorded, as a wedding-gift, to Clotilde, who adored music and was enchanted at the idea of going to the Opera.

"At this very moment," said she to Fleurette, "I am occupying myself, as you may see, with my toilet."

She was, in truth, making herself a white gauze dress, one of the freshest, simplest, and prettiest one could hope to see.

"Ah, god-mother!" cried Fleurette, "let me give you the flowers to put in you hair and to wear at your waist. Do not fear; the most elegant ladies in Paris supply themselves at my place; and you shall have the most beautiful flowers in the shop."

"No," replied Clotilde, "I do not wish it, it would be too expensive."

"What are you thinking of, god-mother! the shop is yours, and I also, as you well know. Do not deprive me of this pleasure."

It was indeed such a great one to Fleurette that Clotilde did not dare pain her by declining.

The next day the flower-girl arrived, with a content and triumphant air, bringing with her a basket of Stars of the Alps and white camellias which she placed at her god-mother's feet.

"Ah! this is too fine for me, a thousand times too fine!" cried Clotilde, less charmed at the beauty of the present than at the sincere transports of delight of Fleurette, whose eyes were radiant with joy and whose hands covered the other with flowers.

The poor child had much hoped to prolong her visit and converse at more length than on the previous day, when she had scarcely had time to speak with her god-mother, but the high and harsh voice of madame de Kéroualle was heard speaking in the front room.

"You must go, now," said Clotilde.

"And how shall I see you again, god-mother?"

"I do not know; for we are going to the *bois de Boulogne* during the day."

"You will pass by my shop; if you could stop there a moment—to buy some flowers—I could see you."

"I will try and induce Géraldine to do so."

The door opened, and madame de Kéroualle appeared; and, dry, cold and icy, she seemed among the flowers, like winter in the middle of Spring. Her scornful eye, resting on the flower-girl, seemed to ask: "How comes this girl here?" and Fleurette hastened to escape without daring to cast a single glance of adieu towards her god-mother. But Clotilde would not let her go away thus, and courageously held out a hand to her.

"Ah!" said Fleurette, as she went away, "my god-mother is brave! She will have a scene on my account." And she returned home thinking of Clotilde.

"No," she said to herself after a while, "my god-mother must not remain in that old-fashioned house; she would die of sorrow. Nor shall she enter a convent; there she would die of weariness, and I don't want her to die at all. *I* want her to remain in the world, among the pleasures of her age, and among the great ladies of whom she would be the best and the most beautiful."

At home she found a visitor, one whom she had no reason to expect, but who nevertheless did not surprise her. It was the duke who, learning from Michelette that Fleurette had gone out, had entered the little *salon*, and there awaited her.

"Ah! *monsieur le duc*," said she, threatening him with her fore-finger, "this is a piece of audacity—"

"At which you are offended?"

"For which I thank you," said she, offering him her hand.

"Ah!" cried he, carrying it respectfully to his lips, "whether you wish to or not, Fleurette, you must pardon

me and put up with me. Yesterday you were without a visit from me, but that was not a usual holiday. As for me, two days without seeing you is too long, so I am here once more."

He seated himself beside her; and then, in charming language, all that love and desire could inspire, which was tender, gallant and captivating was uttered by this young and handsome nobleman, whom up to that time no great lady had ever resisted. Fleurette felt that only a portion of what he said was really true, but that part was so sweet and the rest, though false, was still so seductive that she had great difficulty in finding good arguments with which to defend herself, in fact her troubled mind found none. In vain did she call her reason to her aid, it forsook her: she was entranced, if not persuaded, and even her heart, accomplice of her senses, was perhaps about to betray her when, all at once, there arose before the eyes of her mind the image of her god-mother, from whom she had just parted, her good angel, her guardian angel!

She arose, and tore herself from Fernand's arms. The charm was dissipated, reason and calmness had returned to her. Instantly, with the rapidity of light, and as if this angel could inspire only noble and generous sentiments, the greatest, the sublimest of all suddenly offered itself to her heart and mind. She passed her hand over her forehead and eyes, and then regarded Fernand with a smile which was pure, tranquil and candid.

"My cause is lost!" murmured he.

"Is is really true then," she asked him with an accent full of kindness, "that you want me to make you happy?"

"Yes," said he passionately, "my happiness depends on you."

"Is it possible," said she, bowing her head; "yes, I really believe that it rests with me to render you happy, forever, happy!" She stopped a moment, and then smiling went on: "Eh, well! let it be so."

"My cause is gained!" said d'Olona to himself.

"But you should reflect well," continued Fleurette.

"Aye!" muttered the duke, "if we reflect everything is yet in doubt."

"Remember," repeated Fleurette gaily, "that to charge

ones self with making you happy, forever happy, is to assume a very great responsibility, and before accepting it I demand that from the present moment you obey me in everything."

"I promise it!" eagerly cried the duke.

"I insist that you shall accede to all my fancies and caprices."

"I swear it!"

"And if they appear a little odd to you—"

"So much the better!"

"Even extravagant—"

"That is what I want."

"You are not to take me to task for them."

"Certainly not."

"Eh! well, sir; to prove my esteem for you, I have first a great secret to confide to you and then, my friend, for I commence a little to regard you as such, I have a great service to ask of you."

"Thanks," cried he joyfully, "speak, I am here."

"Ah! ah!" said she, looking at him, "you are brave and do not tremble. I commence: what are you going to do this evening?"

"I dine with the duchess de Medina."

"You must break your engagement, you must not go."

"Agreed!"

"You will go to the Opera."

"With you?"

"No, alone. You will place yourself in the balcony."

"Very well."

"Armed with your glass you will, as usual, survey the whole house in order to discover the prettiest woman. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. Thus far it is not very difficult."

"Above all you will regard the grand boxes in the first tier."

"Why?"

"You will see in one of them a charming young girl in a white gauze robe, and that you may not confound her with others I will tell you in advance that she will wear in her hair and at her waist Stars of the Alps; our old signal, which you so well know."

"I understand," said the duke, smiling, "a charming surprise you promise me. It will be yourself."

"Almost. It will at least be another self, or perhaps," said she laughing, "I shall take this new form for a change. You love variety."

"What do you mean?"

"This," said she seriously, "is the great secret that I have to confide to you and the immense service I have to ask of you."

"But," said the duke, puzzled, what do you expect of me—what must I do this evening?"

"Nothing, but to regard this young girl closely, and to come to me to-morrow and tell me frankly and without flattery if the roses of the Alps I have sold her are becoming to her."

"You are laughing at me," said the duke in a half serious, half jesting tone.

"How, monsieur," cried she indignantly, "you swear to obey all of my orders, my caprices, whatever they may be, and the very first one I impose on you—"

"You are right," said he.

"You ought not to even question whether I am right."

"That is true. Don't get angry, Fleurette, I will go to the Opera this evening."

"And you will do well."

She watched him go out to his carriage, followed him some distance with her eyes, and as he became lost to sight she, looking up to heaven, said to herself.

"It is in the hands of God."

CHAPTER X.

THE Opera was resplendent with light, beautiful toilets, and the fashionable world; there was to be produced (an extraordinary occurence) a new work, the author and composer of which were both French, and which came

from neither Germany nor Italy; for the Parisian Opera, formerly the first theatre of the world and one of the national glories, can at present give us nothing but translations or works of great Italians or Germans. This evening they had left Italy and re-entered France; there was a crowd.

The Kérouallc family had taken their position in one of the front boxes of the first tier. Géraldine, the bride-elect, was in the front right-hand seat in full dress; behind her sat her future husband, to whom the easy-going character of his *fiancée* promised in his household a reign absolute and without opposition. It may be remembered that Géraldine always agreed with the last speaker.

Near her, also in the first rank, was her youngest sister, Corentine, Clotilde's pupil who, under her new mistress still retained her childish habit of constantly laughing, a monotonous and insupportable gaiety which proved nothing, certainly not the amiability of her character, which was undisguisedly false and envious.

On the the other side *madame la marquise de Kérouallc* was seated, so that the mother and two daughters were in the front, and Clotilde was behind Corentine. But Corentine was so small and Clotilde so majestic and beautiful that the latter towered above the former by at least one half her height, so that although in the second row she appeared to be in the first.

There was still a vacant seat in the box which should have remained unoccupied had not Ludovic Durussel, who was with his mother in another box, perceived the ladies and come to salute them and pay his respects to the marquise, her daughters and son-in-law. He remained with them throughout the first act acting as their cicerone, pointing out to them all the celebrities of the day, male and female, as they made their appearance.

He had already shown them some of the most illustrious when they noticed a great commotion in the house. The glasses of all the ladies were no longer directed towards the tenor, who was just then singing his principal air, but towards a young man with a charming shape and figure who at that moment made his appearance in the balcony of the first tie boxes.

"Ah! what a superb cavalier!" cried the marquise

"He resembles king Charles, the Second, of England, whose portrait is at our chateau in Brittany."

"It is true," responded Géraldine, who never contradicted anybody, "so he does."

"It is his living self," said Corentine, with a shout of laughter which aroused murmurs among her neighbors.

"Certainly," said the marquise, looking through her glass and persisting in her opinion, "he is the handsomest cavalier I have ever seen."

"He is the handsomest I have ever seen," repeated Géraldine, without thinking of her intended being present.

Corentine again commenced to laugh, to the great annoyance of her neighbors, whom she prevented from hearing the music.

At this moment many ladies in the first boxes, among others a princess, bowed in return to the salute which the handsome young man had addressed to them.

"Who is this young gentleman?" asked the marquise of Ludovic.

"He is my intimate friend," replied Ludovic, lowering his eyes from modesty, duke Fernand d'Olona, the man who is at present all the rage, a grandee of Spain, whose father has been president of an American republic—of—I can never pronounce the name: but, what is of still more importance, he has gold and diamond mines in that country; in short he does not himself know the extent of his fortune.

"Last month he gave us, at his mansion in the *rue Saint Honore*, a delicious supper *apropos* of an adventure—which I would relate to madame la marquise and monsieur de Kêrvalec if these young ladies were not present—because the duke, adores women, you know, above all when they are beautiful."

"Monsieur Ludovic," said the marquise shaking her fan at him, "take care. Ah, gracious heavens!" she cried interrupting herself, "it seems as if the duke d'Olona is looking at me."

"Yes indeed, mother," repeated Géraldine, "it is evident that he is looking at us."

"So he is," said Corentine, with a shout of laughter which this time seriously disturbed the dilettanti in the amphi-theatre. The marquise made her a sign to be quiet,

and then cried out: "But see, son-in-law, see, monsieur Ludovic; the duke's glass is constantly directed to this box. I do not understand such perseverance," said she smiling, "for decidedly it is I that he is gazing at."

"It is I," repeated Géraldine.

"It is I," giggled Corentine.

It was plain that the duke's attention was just then altogether concentrated upon their box. He had at once sought and soon perceived the head-dress and bouquet of Stars of the Alps, which Fleurette had that morning described, then he had remarked with admiration the young person who wore them, and the more he contemplated her the more he went into ecstasies over the regularity of her features, the shape of her figure, the beauty of her stature, in short over her whole ensemble, which was so gracious and charming that he was unable to withdraw his eyes from her. He asked himself how such a marvel had up to the present escaped his eyes, and interrogated an old gentleman near him in regard to the persons occupying the box with the beautiful unknown.

"Hold on!" said the old gentleman, in his turn looking through a glass, "I believe I recognize a lady with whom I danced in my youth the marquise de Kéroualle. Those are probably her daughters in the first row, for I can see a family resemblance."

"Yes," said Fernand, "but I am speaking of the young lady in the second row; it is a shame that she should not be in the first and is kept thus in retirement."

"She is, indeed, perfectly beautiful," cried the old gentleman, who continued gazing at her. "She has turned her eyes this way, how admirable they are! what a dazzling complexion! what a distinguished air! it is veritable perfection; but I do not know her and am unable to say who she is."

Happily the duke, whose opera-glass was at that moment directed towards the rear of the marquise's box, was sure that he distinguished Ludovic Durussel's features; so that he now had the hope of positive information, and between the acts he directed his steps towards the lobby where he was almost certain he would meet Ludovic. He was not mistaken, for in a few minutes the latter appeared. The

duke took the other's arm, at which honor Ludovic was so flattered that for a moment he almost forgave Fernand his competition for Fleurette.

"So you know madame la marquis de Kéroualle?" said Fernand.

"Very well, my dear duke, very well indeed. She is an intimate friend of my mother, who even wished to marry me to one of the marquise's daughters. Fortunately the eldest is married, the second is about to be, and the third is not yet old enough to be feared. One can, then, visit the family without any danger. That is why you saw me with them this evening."

"And the beautiful young lady, the third, who is she?"

"She is also one of the family, an orphan cousin; that is all I know of her. As to the marquise—"

"I have often heard her spoken of," said the duke, "and for a long time I have wished to be presented to her. Will you render me that service, my dear Ludovic?"

"Yes, indeed!" cried Ludovic, enchanted at the importance this would give him; and he hastened to conduct the duke to the ladies, saying to the marquise that monsieur d'Olona, his best friend, had solicited the honor of an introduction to her.

The old marquise, whose welcome was most gracious, then took entire charge of the conversation with the duke, who listened to her with difficulty. While she was speaking Fernand, motionless from admiration, regarded Clotilde, who lowered her eyes and remained silent. The duke was as quiet as herself, which did not prevent the marquise and her daughters, when the second act had commenced and he had taken leave of them, from crying out in chorus: "How amiable, how charming he is!"

The duke returned home preoccupied. In his whole gallery he had no picture, no statue which could be compared to mademoiselle de Kéroualle. An enthusiastic admirer of beauty, he had never seen any object of art more beautiful. As a woman, he could come to no conclusion; she had not spoken a ward, nor opened her mouth. She had been all the time like a statue. Meanwhile, he thought of her, and still more of Fleurette. What secret could she

have to confide to him in regard to this young lady? What service to demand of him?

"In any case, what a strange and singular girl Fleurette is!" he said to himself. "At the very moment when she no longer declines my attentions, when she even consents to accept them, to offer such a beauty to my eyes, an extraordinary, ideal beauty; the type of perfection! Yet Fleurette has intelligence, and knows my ardent imagination and passionate taste for all that is beautiful; still, what a blunder in her!"

Well, blunder or not, Fleurette usually had the art and talent necessary for intrigue, and this time, too, she had completely succeeded, for all night he dreamt of this new adventure, of Fleurette, of the beautiful statue, and of the answer to the enigma.

Important visits prevented his going to the flower-girl's before mid-day. He found her about to go out.

"How! Fleurette, are you going away?"

"Yes, indeed. An important affair—"

"But I want to speak with you; I have a thousand things to tell you. Last night I was at the Opera."

"I know it."

"And how?"

"From the Kéroualles, who just now stopped to buy some flowers of me. They are going in their old fashioned carriage to the *bois de Boulogne*: they are in the habit of going there almost every day."

"That is not the question, but of my encounter of yesterday evening," said he quickly.

"Eh, well! did the Stars of the Alps produce a good effect?" she asked with interest.

"Yes, indeed."

"Did they really produce a good effect?"

"A charming one," he answered impatiently.

"I am delighted; that is all I wished."

"Yes; but the secret—the service you promised to ask of me, tell it to me quick."

"Not to day, *monsieur le duc*,—I am going to an important sale at the most celebrated flower-gardener's in Paris, Lemiché, *rue des Trois Couronnes*, whose gardens are to be sold to day."

"And when will you return?"

"I don't know; the sail will last to-day and to-morrow, perhaps even longer."

"It is impossible; you must not go."

"Business before everything, *monsieur le duc*, I have often told you that I wished to make my fortune myself, so you must let me make it."

"And I wish to have a long conversation with you."

"That would take time, and I haven't any to spare to-day."

"Stop, Fleurette, you are insupportable."

"I never said that I wasn't; but you promised to take me with all my faults, and I hold you to it, considering that they form the greater portion of me."

"That settles it, of course," impatiently cried the duke, "one has to conform to your good pleasure; but I, what is to become of *me?*"

"It is superb weather; mount your horse, go to the *bois*, and meet the ladies who sweeten the air with the Parma violets I sold them." And she jumped into a passing omnibus, crying out to him:

"A pleasant ride!"

So the duke, in order to pass away the time, was obliged to mount his horse. The latter conducted him to the *bois de Boulogne*, where, by chance, and as Fleurette had foreseen, he encountered the marquise and her retinue. By day Clotilde appeared still more beautiful than she had the night before. He saluted the ladies as he passed their old carriage, and easily read in their eyes, and divined in Clotilde's, that they were speaking of his imposing bearing and of his figure on horseback. The marquise, who very much relished his conversation or, rather, silence, detained him at the door to converse with him. He did not interrupt her. This was the kind of dialogue she preferred and the surest method of winning her good opinion. He watched Clotilde, to whom he chanced once or twice to address a word, and she answered him, with a sweet and delicious voice, in a few words, simple, natural, and full of tact and suitableness, while Géraldine fatigued him with her monotonous phrases, Clorentine with her incessant laughter.

CHAPTER XI.

The next day Fleurette, as if purposely, spent at the sale in the *fauburg Saint Antoine* and the duke at the *bois de Boulogne.* On this day the sun was magnificent, and the ladies descended from their carriage and seated themselves near the lake. The duke, who had also dismounted from his horse, met them and took a seat near them and continued the conversation of yesterday with the marquise, except a few words that he spoke from time to time in order to draw a response from Clotilde, whose fresh and vermillion lips when opened to speak or to smile disclosed the most beautiful teeth ever seen. And in answering the duke she was obliged to raise her eyes, usually cast down and concealed by their long black lashes, eyes whose softness and brilliancy were unequalled.

After a while they returned to their carriage, gallantry compelling Fernand to give his arm to madame de Kéroualle; but love recompensed him, for in front of him, arm in arm with Géraldine, slowly marched Clotilde, whose elegant figure distracted him and prevented his hearing the compliments of the old marquise.

On the following day the flower sale was at last ended. The flower-girl had made most advantageous purchases. She was at home; one could converse with her. The duke was already seated in her little *salon.* He had just arrived and could speak of nothing but Clotilde.

"How did you become acquainted with her? How did you know she would go to the Opera the other evnning?" And a thousand other questions.

"Monseigneur," said Fleurette coldly, "can you spare me a half an hour?"

"A half hour! Why I have all day, all my life, at your service as you ought to know. Speak! I have no greater happiness than listening to you!"

"You think so?" said she with a doubtful yet satisfied smile.

"Certainly," said the duke in the best faith in the world.

"Then listen to me."

Then with a frankness and confidence which she accorded, not to the duke d'Olona, but to her friend, her best friend, she told him her entire life: she related how a poor girl of the people, a vagabond, a bohemienne, almost without bread and clothes, she had had for her first and only protectress a noble young girl of about her own age; how this young girl had been her god-mother, her guardian angel, and her guide on earth and towards heaven; how she owed to her generosity her own modest fortune, and to her counsels the knowledge of God, of honor and of duty, the development in short of all the good sentiments she ever possessed.

"She passed rapidly over that which concerned Fleurette, the florist; but, with the warmth of gratitude and the enthusiasm of friendship, she described at length the virtues of her god-mother, her noble poverty, her resignation, and her courage. With indignation she pictured her precarious and dependant position, or rather her bondage. Fernand, like Fleurette, was affected and indignant. Never had a more able, eloquent and devoted advocate pleaded a cause before a better disposed judge. She finally came to Clotilde's project of entering a convent when her youngest cousin's education should be finished. Fernand trembled and Fleurette, taking his hand, said to him:

"Now here is the secret I promised to confide to you." And, in a low voice, she told him the means she expected to take and had already taken to make a dowry for her god-mother.

"Ah!" cried Fernand with emotion, and tears in his eyes, "you are a brave girl, Fleurette, and one that I love with all my heart, and shall always love."

"I very much hope you may," said she.

"But, my poor child, you, who are ordinarily so sensible, are all wrong in this."

"I fear I am," said she. "I have commenced to understand that I should have to make such a great deal that I would never reach the goal, or it would take me so long that by the time I did earn it my god-mother and I would

both be very old. But I have thought of your assisting me. If I ask nothing for myself, I do not blush at asking for my friends and from my friends. There," said she regarding him, "is the service I expect from you."

Fernand embraced her with gratitude.

"Speak!—dispose of my fortune—it is yours."

"That is what I said to myself," she naively responded. "Not too large a dowry," she quickly added, "so that my god-mother may think it it comes from my business and savings."

"Alas, my dear child," said Fernand, sadily regarding her, "you still deceive yourself. Never would mademoiselle de Kéroualle, if she is like your description of her, receive from her, god-child this modest fortune, the fruit of her labors; never, from your account of her, would she accept anything from you, and still less from another."

"Possibly," said Fleurette. Then after a moments reflection she sighed, and said; "It is true. What is to be done, then?"

"Re-assure yourself," said Fernand, "for with her birth, name and beauty it is likely that mademoiselle Clotilde de Kéroualle will find honorable lovers; and as soon as one shall have seen her—"

"And who is likely to see her?" cried Fleurette. "She leaves in a few days to become once more and forever, a slave in the remotest part of Brittany; and then you forget that she has no dowry, and is poor, poor as poverty."

"She!" said Fernand, enthusiastically, "who has treasures of youth, virtue and beauty!"

"To be content with those treasures," answered Fleurette, shaking her head, "would require one who had fortune, heart and good sense; some one, in short, who understands that he is making a good bargain in purchasing happiness with his money; but where find such a one, in the present day, among our millionaires?"

"And then," said Fernand coldly, "even if he should present himself, would she accept him?"

"You are right. I believe she *is* difficult to please, and that fortune alone would never decide her."

"There is a last way!" cried the duke.

"What is it!" quickly demanded Fleurette.

"Getting her a position as a maid of honor at the court of some queen or princess. I will make this my business, you may be sure." He gave her his hand and went thoughtfully away.

"Ah!" said Fleurette, placing her hand on her heart, "I have done all I could and ought; I dare do no more. Let us wait!" So she waited.

Several days passed without her seeing the duke. She could hardly have told how this absence affected her; she was sorry for herself and contented for her projects; the time of which Fernand deprived her was doubtless given to her god-mother. It was hope joined to regret; but Fleurette was a feeling and sensible girl who mistook neither her own nor the duke's character. The love of a day, soon followed by desertion, was it worth the loss of her own respect or of her god-mother's, the loss of a friend, perhaps of two! So that the more she reflected the more ardently she desired the success of a dream, which, while overturning her own foolish hopes, assured the happiness of the two persons whom she loved the most of all the world.

The duke returned after several day's. He was changed. He said he had been ill. What was at least evident was that he had suffered. Fleurette was glad to see him and tried to thank him for coming; she was not exacting. These regrets were not a triumph, but a consolation which satisfied her friendship.

"Fleurette," he said to her, "my good Fleurette you are such a brave and charming girl that I am afraid I shall greatly fal. in your estimation, and this idea troubles and torments me."

"What is all this about?" she suddenly asked, but turning a trifle pale nevertheless.

"You see," said he, taking the young girl's hand and affectionately pressing it against his heart, "I love you."

"You are right in doing so,"

"But what is singular is that I love you more and more, with a franker sincerer love than ever."

"It was not then formerly entirley so?"

"Yes indeed, and to give you a proof of my frankness," *continued* he embarrassed, "I wished—I do not know how

to say it—but it seems to me—just now—that I am in love with—another!"

For a few moments she regarded him with the pure and radiant air which frequently accompanies the making of a sacrifice or the accomplishment of duty, and then, tendering him her hand said:

"If it is my god-mother *monsieur le duc*, I pardon you."

He uttered a cry of surprise.

"But if not she," gaily went on.

"I will retain you and give you to nobody."

"What! Fleurette; you do not complain of my inconstancy?"

"It is my fault, I caused it."

"And this love so prompt and so sudden, you do not reproach me with it?"

"I desire it, I created it. Don't you remember, *monsieur le duc*, that I imprudently swore to render you happy, forever happy? It was a rash promise and beyond my strength, so I have chosen that my god-mother should keep it."

"Ah! you are generous," said the duke looking gratefully at her. "You even wish to free me from the remorse from which I have been suffering, It seemed to me such a piece of treachery, and that I should lose a friend."

"It will be giving me one, instead, for now I have two, you and she."

Then she smilingly asked: "Have you made your declarations!"

"Not yet. But," he said, with fear, "do you believe she will like me?"

"You love her a great deal, monseigneur; you were not so timid and modest with me. But what can I tell you? One never knows a young girls true thoughts: with them one can answer for nothing."

"Ah! you frighten me," cried he turning pale.

"No," she laughingly replied," I am taking my revenge. See my god-mother somewhere and ask her the question yourself."

"No," said he impatiently. "I must in the usual way and according to custom, first make my demand of the old marquise."

"And you have not yet been there?"

"I am going there now," said he and he hurried out to his carrage.

CHAPTER XII.

THE marquise had returned early from her usual promenade. On that day there was to be a dinner of ceremonny at her mansion. She was to receive influential persons holding high places; two councillors of State, a director-general, and even a minister, the protector of her future son-in-law. The marquise had ordered her daughters and Clotilde to be ready at an early hour, so these three young ladies in full dressed had entered the *salon* before any of the guests had arrived.

All three were seated, but were not conversing. Clotilde, sadder even than usual, was perhaps thinking, without acknowedging it to herself, of a young and handsome cavalier who had for eight days constantly presented himself to her eyes; Géraldine, according to her usual custom, was thinking of nothing; and Corentine was thinking of Clotilde's dress which, though very plain, was charming, and much more beautiful, or, to speak more correctly, more gracefully and elegantly carried than her own.

All at once the door leading to the marquise's apartments opened, and that lady appeared already dressed for her reception, but in an extraording state of trouble and excitement and violently shaking the fan which she carried in order to modify as much as possible the warmth which mounted to her face and betrayed her emotion.

"What is it, mother? What has happened?" nonchalantly asked Géraldine.

"What has happened!" said the marquise, vainly attempting to conceal her anger under an ironical smile, an attempt, however, which she soon renounced, and, profiting by the the absence of any stranger, she gave a free rein to her bad humor. "What has happened, young ladies. Why I have received a visit I did not expect nor you either."

"Truly!" laughed Corentine, "and from whom?"

"*M. le duc d'Olona*, grandee of Spain, and one of the richest lords of Europe," said she, with bitterness. "And he came—you will scarcely believe it, I who heard him cannot yet believe it—for the most unheard of, the most unforeseen, the most singular and the most astonishing purpose." She was about to recite in its entirety, and without thinking of it, madame de Sévigné's famous letter, had not her daughters impatiently cried out:

"What? what?"

"Well," said the marquise, elevating her voice, "he came to propose to me—"

"*You*, mother!" cried Géraldine naively, clasping her hands in surprise.

"No!" said the marquise, throwing a withering glance upon her, "he came to propose to me for your cousin Clotilde."

Géraldine uttered an exclamation of surprise; Clotilde became as pale as death, and pressed her hand on her heart, which was beating as if it would burst, but she said not a word; and Corentine uttered a shout of laughter.

"What are you laughing at, you little fool?" angrily cried the marquise.

"At this proposed marriage," answered Corentine, "which is impossible and will never take place."

"Then it will be," said the marquise, looking at Clotilde, "because mademoiselle does not wish it, for the duke has come to formally ask my consent to the marriage and to obtain that of my niece and has also asked permission to pay his court to her in person. Those are his own words." And, regarding Clotilde, she said dryly: "I have told it all."

What she did not tell was the revolution that this unforseen demand had caused her, nor the feeling of envy she had experienced at seeing this unexpected and immense fortune fall to a relative who was her antipathy and who, up to the present, she had regarded as belonging to the lowest branch of the family. She had said to herself that since the duke was so anxious to unite himself to their illustrious house he would have done well to wait one or two years, and then ask Corentine in marriage. Even now, and though

she was only sixteen years old, this alliance was not impossible. In short she had said to herself all that mothers usually do say when they have daughters to marry and see others asked in marriage in preference to their own offspring.

In her anger she had for a moment thought of not consenting to the match. But how justify a refusal? It would appear odious, and besides it would be useless, in the face of Clotilde's probable acceptance, for after all she was not a near relative and was independent of the marquise. On the other hand, and apart from her envy, she had promptly considered all the advantages which might result from this union. The splendor which would be reflected upon their house, the strong and rich protector it would give them, and the chances it would give her for marrying off her third daughter, the last and most difficult of all to dispose of. The marquise took all these into consideration.

"Eh! well, my dear cousin," said she to Clotilde, and it had been a long time since she had called the young girl by that name, "it seems that you do not understand the question, and that you are insensible to all I have done for you."

"No, cousin," sweetly answered Clotilde, who, amid this sudden and unhoped for good fortune, which would have greatly dazzled almost anyone else, preserved her calmness and dignity, to the great astonishment of the marquise; "I thank you for the approbation you seem to accord to the duke's demand."

"But it is your own consent, mademoiselle, that is in question."

"To-morrow, madame, if you will permit me, I will tell the duke what I think of the honor he has done me. Until then will you allow me this evening in which to recover myself and to reflect?"

"I understand; you do not wish to honor our dinner with your presence."

"I did not say that, madame."

"Well, I agree; on condition that you make your appearance among us for a while this evening."

"I promise to do so, madame," said Clotilde, making a profound courtesy, and then she retired to her modest chamber. As she disappeared the marquise majestically said aloud:

"Till this evening, duchess!"

"Duchess!" cried Corentine, whom that word made bound out of her chair. "Then she is to be a duchess? They will call her 'duchess,' they will announce '*madame la duchesse*'?"

"Certainly."

"If the marriage takes place," said Corentine, bowing her head; "but I repeat; it never shall."

"Why not?"

"Oh! it is only an idea of mine," said the girl with a loud laugh.

This family discussion was interrupted by the successive arrivals of the guests. The marquise, although she had resolved to preserve silence on the subject, and though the news was not yet official, was unable to resist the temptation of boasting to each guest privately. On all sides they congratulated her so heartily that she commenced to fear she had married her second daughter too soon, and reproached herself with her new son-in-law, the receiver-general, being now persuaded that she could have done better.

During the evening, in obedience to her cousin, Clotilde entered the *salon* about tea-time. Her presence, which yesterday would have been unnoticed, now produced a general effect. She was the object of so much consideration, indirect homage and circuitous compliments (addressed in advance to the future duchess), that, being unaccustomed to such honors, she was almost disconcerted.

As to Corentine, she no longer laughed; she scarcely slept any all that night, and during the few moments that she did close her eyes she dreamt with joy that the match was broken off.

About the middle of the next day the duke d'Olona was announced. He was received in the grand *salon* by the marquise, her son-in-law, her daughters and Clotilde. They were all in full dress. The duke bowed, and five profound reverences responded to his salute. This ceremoniousness, arranged in advance by the marquise, was not without its embarrassment for Fernand; one can imagine then the effect it produced upon poor Clotilde.

The duke promptly recovered himself and, casting upon

his intended glances full of admiration and love, he explained to her in a few frank and simple words the esteem he felt for her and the desire he had to see his suit accepted; scarcely knowing her, he had not the pretention of being pleasing to her, but he asked her permission to try and become so. Clotilde, troubled at this solemn declaration before so many witnesses, trembling and lowering her eyes, responded that she, as well as her family, felt highly honored at his request and would be very much flattered by his visits. During these cold and ceremonious words, which almost froze Fernand's heart, Clotilde's own heart beat violently.

Ah! if the young suitor could only have read that touched and melted heart, so full of affection and gratefulness, he would have seen that the most precious of all his treasures to the poor orphan was his love; that love which she secretly enjoyed; that love which was her happiness and was about to become her duty. This was what was already engraved upon Clotilde's heart, but unfortunately Fernand was unable to divine it.

He hoped that after the introduction he would be left alone with his intended, or that he would at least be permitted to speak with her apart; but the marquise took care not to leave them alone, and either she or one of her daughters took constant care, through respect for customs, to place herself between Clotilde and the duke.

Taken with the beauty and grace of Clotilde, fascinated by the charm she spread around her, he could not withdraw his eyes from her, and the young girl, trembling and embarrassed under this ardent and passionate regard, which fairly consumed her, kept her eyes almost constantly lowered.

"Ah!" said Fernand to himself despairingly, "she accepts, but does not love, me."

Meanwhile, he every morning sent his lover's bouquet to the Kéroualle Mansion; I need not say from whom he purchased it. Fleurette had the patronage of the duke's household as a right. Every evening he assiduously went to pay his court, and though madame de Kéroualle's large *salon* was frightfully wearisome he abandoned for it all those of which he had so lately been the ornament and hero. He had broken off with the beautiful duchess, and many others also bewailed the handsome young duke. He

no longer went to the Opera. He regularly arrived at his fiancée's at nine o'clock, and remained there till eleven. He would find the four ladies at work round a table, and would listen to the marquise's recitals concerning the nobility of Brittany, M. de Kervalec's observations on finance, Géraldine's platitudes and Corentine's ceaseless laughter. He would gaze at his betrothed, who was most of the time silent and whose voice he scarcely knew, contemplating her with admiration all the evening, and would then return home to dream of her.

This is a specimen of the life he led for fifteen days; and his love must have been great to have enabled him to endure it. Happily half of his trials were over; the marriage was to take place in two weeks more; it was fixed for the end of the month.

Fernand's only pleasure, the only compensation for his ennui, was to go and see Fleurette. He always found her the sincere and devoted friend she had promised to be; always ready to listen to his troubles and to console him when he spoke of his betrothed's indifference.

"Why do you complain?" she would say. "Is it because your intended is too beautiful, too modest and too proper? Should a noble young lady act like a grisette; like me, for instance? Should she say to you from the very first: 'I love you?' It would do well enough in me, but to her it is impossible. So don't worry. All the love she is now saving up in her heart you will one day receive with interest."

Then she would go to her god-mother, and preach to her in turn. Of course Fleurette did not say a word concerning the great part she had played in bringing about this marriage; that would have destroyed all the value of the benefit. She had even expressed great surprise when her godmother had announced it to her; for the day after the duke's offer Clotilde had sent for Fleurette, and had written to her aunt Beatrix, her second mother, at Nancy. Fleurette and Beatrix! They were her only friends, her real family.

The poor old aunt had almost died of joy on learning the good news; and had told it all over the convent. Unfortunately her ill health prevented her assisting at the

wedding, but she hoped that as soon as it had taken place *monsier le duc* and *madame la duchesse* would come to her at Nancy; which they formally promised her to do.

As to Fleurette, she had no need to affect a joy that she so sincerely felt. Without saying anything to anyone she was proud of her work; proud to have at last given her god-mother a dowry still more magnificient than the one she had dreamt of and had commenced to lay aside for her. She was happy at this marriage, contrived by her address and prepared by her care, which she was certain would take place in spite of all mademoiselle Corentine's sinister predictions. She, also, reproached her god-mother with her coolness to her lover.

"Don't you love him?" she asked.

Clotilde blushed, and made no reply.

"But this is unworthy of you. He loves you so much, and gives you so many proofs of it."

"Do you believe," said Clotilde, "that I do not appreciate all he has done for me, and that I am insensible of it."

"Then why not tell him?"

"And the marquise and my cousins?" laughingly replied Clotilde, "and custom and the proprieties?"

"But to me, godmother, who am neither the marquise nor your cousin, thank heaven! to me, who have nothing to do with the proprieties, you can confide all."

"No, never!"

"I understand: you cannot adore him yet. But, between ourselves, you love him a very little, don't you, ever so little as it may be?"

Clotilde looked around, as if to assure herself that no one but Fleurette could hear her; then leaning close to the other's ear she whispered with an energy that the latter would never have supposed her capable of:

"I think only of him; I love him with an exclusive, an insane love, which must surely offend heaven, which frightens me and which God will certainly punish!"

"That is all right!" cried Fleurette, clapping her hands, "I will run and tell him."

"No," said Clotilde, forcibly detaining her, "I forbid it, I would never survive the shame of it!"

"I will not betray you, godmother, I swear to you. But, however, he must know it, *some one* must tell him."

"Be easy," replied Clotilde, blushing, "I will myself tell him, but later on."

Fleurette was satisfied from that moment. She faithfully kept her god-mother's secret; but whenever the duke complained, thereafter, she would shrug her shoulders and say:

"There is nothing so tender as the heart of a virtuous woman, and so you will find out my lord duke."

CHAPTER XIII.

A few days before the marriage was to take place the duke, who had visited the Kéroualle's every evening for three weeks, solicited and at last, but not without difficulty, obtained permission to receive his financée and her family at his own house.

It is scarcely necessary to say that on this day the d'Olona mansion was magnificent with splendor. All Paris crowded into the *salons* to see and admire the future duchess. The brilliancy of the lights, the glass and the gilding, the marble and the porphyry walls, the statues and pictures of great masters, and the artistic objects of all kinds excited a murmur of admiration in the crowd, and in Corentine such a dazzled envy that she became almost ill.

Everyone pressed around Clotilde, the queen of the *fete*, who, in her evening dress, with bare arms and shoulders would that evening have been queen of the world had it been left to the universal suffrage.

The marquise, who in order to reap a share of the compliments showered upon her young relative kept constantly near her, was astonished at Clotilde's calmness, almost indifference, at sight of this palace, these marvels of art, and all the other treasures which were going to become hers.

"Is it possible," cried she, "to possess anything more precious?"

"Yes," murmured Clotilde, kindly pressing the arm Fernand had offered her, and in a voice that he alone heard.

Fernand suppressed an exclamation of joy which arose to his lips. This was the first word of tenderness that had escaped his fiancé. He pressed her dear arm against his heart, and said aloud:

"Clotilde, my dearly beloved, all my riches do not equal in value that word."

A glance from the marquise stopped him, and he contented himself with murmering:

"Three days! three days yet!"

Their marriage would take place in three days.

At six o'clock in the morning the marquise and her daughters had returned home very tired, and Clotilde very happy. The *concierge* handed the young girl a letter in an unknown hand, and which madame de Kéroualle took possession of, Clotilde was not yet married and had not the right to read her own letters. This one was dated at Nancy. It was written by the superior of the convent in which lived Beatrix de Kéroualle, and contained only these words:

"MADEMOISELLE,

"Your aunt has been suddenly attacked by a malady "the nature of which our doctor has not explained to us; "but he appears to be much alarmed, and your aunt, who "ardently desires to see you, constantly calls for you.

"MOTHER ROSALIE, SUPERIOR."

Clotilde did not go to bed. She simply changed her ball dress for a travelling one.

"What are you going to do?" cried the Marquise.

"To leave instantly. My aunt Beatrix has been a second mother to me—I will arrive in time to embrace her, to nurse her, perhaps to save her!"

"But it is impossible! None of us can accompany you, and you cannot go alone."

"I will not go alone."

Now that Clotilde had a duty to perform she was no

longer the timid young girl they had supposed her to be; she displayed in performing this duty an energy of resolution of which no one would have believed her capable.

Day was breaking; she sent for Fleurette and the duke d'Olona.

"For what purpose?" the marquise asked her.

Pre-occupied, Clotilde made no reply. Without losing any time she made all the necessary preparations for a journey. This did not take her long. Fleurette soon arrived, Clotilde showed her the superior's letter.

"I understand," said Fleurette, "I shall go with you, god-mother."

"I counted upon it," said Clotilde embracing her.

"And you did right. I am yours, body and soul! Well, I am here, so let us go."

"But," cried Clotilde," your business, your shop?"

"We will pass by there on our way to the Strasbourg station, and I can give my orders to Michelette, my cashier, who is almost as devoted to me as if she was my god-daughter."

They heard a carriage enter the court. It was the duke's. He had not yet retired when his betrothed's message reached him. He arrived much disturbed in mind.

"Monsieur," Clotilde said to him, thanking him with a grateful look for his promptness in coming to her, "in a few days you would be my husband, in my eyes you are such already, and I ask your permission to go far away from here to save, or assist in her last moments, her who has been a mother to me."

The duke turned pale, and Clotilde whose love was gratified at the sight, saw the grief depicted in his eyes. She gave him her hand in thanks.

"I know you badly, *monsieur le duc*," she continued, "if, when a sacred duty is in question, you do not yourself say to me: 'go, go instantly,'"

"Yes, yes," cried he quickly, "but on condition that I accompany you."

"You, duke!" cried the marquise indignantly.

"Oh!" said Fleurette, smiling, "we will be too crowded, for I am going with my god-mother."

"Thou, Fleurette," said the duke, with a more re-assured

air, that is different; I consent, but thou art responsible to me for her."

"The idea of *thee*-ing and *thou*-ing this young girl!" cried the marquise, greatly scandalized.

"It is customary in Spain," said Fleurette gaily, "among the nobility."

"Yes," said the duke, "the queen *thees* and *thous* everybody. You will at least permit me," continued he to madame de Kroualle, "to accompany my friend to the railway?"

"No," said the pitiless marquise.

"Well, at any rate to put my carriage at her orders?"

"That is different, I will permit that."

The travellers were ready. While they were carrying Clotilde's trunk to the carriage, she embraced the marquise, Géraldine and Corentine, who, her eyes shining with joy, murmured to herself: "I said truly that the marriage would not take place, and here it is already delayed."

The marquise and her daughters accompanied Clotilde and Fleurette to the head of the stairway; and the duke gave his arm to his fiancé down the stairs to the door of the carriage, when, addressing his coachman and servants, he said:

"Do not forget that you are at the orders of mademoiselle de Kéroualle."

Then turning towards her, as she was about entering the carriage, he placed on one of her fingers a ring which had formerly belonged to his mother, a precious relic in which he had great confidence.

"And now," cried he, "when shall I see you again?"

"I do not know," she sadly replied.

"And you go away," said he holding his arms supplicatingly towards her, "without saying adieu to your fiancé, *to your husband!*"

She lowered her eyes and made no reply.

"All he asks, however, at parting and in exchange for his ring is a souvenier—a kiss!"

"I forbid it!" cried the marquise from the stairs.

"And I permit it," said Fleurette, pushing her godmother into Fernand's arms, and he became so excited that

in pressing his fiancé to his heart his lips met hers, and in his joy he murmured:

"Thank you, Fleurette!"

The young girls entered the carriage, the door was closed, and the horses soon disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

As had been agreed upon they stopped for a moment in the *boulevard de la Madeleine*. Fleurette gave her instructions to Michelette, as to what the latter should do during her absence, which ought not to be long, and a quarter of an hour later, drawn by two vigorous horses at a trot, they arrived at the Eastern railway. They entered a railway carriage and started on their journey.

That same evening they arrived at Nancy, after having spent the day in conversing of their fears and hopes, love and friendship; that is to say their conversation had been about Fernand and aunt Beatrix.

The convent of the Sainte-Marie sisters, in which Beatrix lived as a lady pensioner, was a pious asylum inhabited by holy daughters and directed by a woman of superior merit. She had given the sick aunt the most attentive and intelligent care, and received the niece with a kindness altogether maternal.

Clotilde at once asked to see her aunt, and nothing could be more touching than their interview; Beatrix was so happy to hear the voice of her niece, to clasp her hands in her own, and to receive her kisses, that they feared for the result of the emotion caused by the visit. It might prove fatal. On the contrary, it seemed to do her good; that night she was easier, and the improvement continued the next day, or at least the violent fever, which had nearly carried off the patient, abated somewhat in intensity; it was a very feeble hope, doubtless, but what was of more consequence, was the confidence which Clotilde's arrival

had given the invalid. She was now certain of living, she was saved! Her dear niece was with her. And from this moment; and whatever should be the issue of this terrible struggle between life and death, Clotilde understood that her place was at the bedside of the patient; but she had great difficulty in making Fleurette understand that the latter's presence was now needless to her, and that she ought to return to Paris to attend to her own affairs.

"But you suffer, godmother and I ought to be here."

"And *he*," tenderly answered Clotilde, "doubtless he also suffers. Return to Paris so that he may have news of me. I cannot write to him, it is not proper and is impossible: but for you it is different; I will write to you from day to day whatever happens to me here; the recovery of my aunt, her convalescence, and my approaching return, so that you may be able, after that, to—"

"To again fix the wedding-day," said Fleurette, smiling. "You give me such good reasons that I have nothing to reply. I will obey you and return by the next train." She was going away, but turned back.

"You still trust in me, god-mother, do you not? and at the least danger and at the least sorrow, you will recall me?"

"I promise you to do, so," said Clotilde embracing her.

Fleurette left, and Clotilde, returning to her aunt, established herself in the sick-room, which she no longer left day or night.

On the day of Fleurette's departure the patient had improved and had recovered enough strength to speak.

"Oh! my dear duchess!" said she holding out her hand to Clotilde, "this illness has come at a time very *mal-a-propos* for your marriage."

"Never mind, aunt; you will soon assist at it, and if that is all that disturbs you—"

"There is yet another thing; for I, whose life has so long been tranquil, have received two shocks in succession, which has perhaps caused my illness—two such unforseen events!"

"What are they, my good aunt?"

"In the first place, your marriage; and then another piece of news which has completely upset me."

"Tell it to me; but not if it will fatigue you too much."

"Oh! no, it will do me good, all the more that it is our dearest family interest, and I can speak of it to you alone."

She meditated an instant, then, holding the young girl's hand in her own, she continued:

"I have always loved you dearly, my Clotilde, but there is another whom I have loved almost as well, the wickedest member of the family, my dear nephew, Jean de Kérouallc, your brother, who is much older than you."

"But he died," said Clotilde," a long time ago."

Beatrix, whose emotion was visible, shook her head negatively: she wished to continue but her tears prevented her. Clotilde placed her hand over her aunt's mouth and forbade her saying another word. Beatrix then made a sign with her hand to open the drawer of a small stand placed near her bed. Clotilde found a letter in it bearing the New Orleans post-mark. She carried it to her aunt, who, pointing to the date of its arrival, indicated that she had only very recently received it. She made Clotilde a sign to read it, which the latter accordingly did. It was couched in the following terms.

"My dear and venerated aunt,

"Do not let the signature of this letter make you believe "in ghosts. Your nephew Jean, who has caused you so "many troubles and whose part you always took and whom "you loved so much, still lives. You will probably say; 'that "is nothing—only one scapegrace the more.' No, aunt: "time, fatigue, a wandering life and hard labor have entirely "changed him. You would no longer recognize him except "for one thing; he still loves you. Yes, aunt, from a worth-"less nobleman I have become a good and honest merchant. "At last, and not without difficulty, my fortune is solidly "established; but I am getting old, and have been overtak-"en with the gout and other ills which pin me down to this "abominable country; were it not for that I would have "gone to you. So come then to me, my good aunt; that "in my mature age I may be able to repay you the happiness "and care that you lavished upon me in my younger days. "Bring my sister also, for I ought to have a very young one "who came, as I have been told, after my departure to "to bring consolation and joy to the paternal mansion in

"which I left nothing but sadness and ruin. Is life less "rigorous for you, my good aunt? I dare not hope it. In "any case, and that you may come to me as soon as possible, "I send to you and my sister the enclosed draft, which you "will not refuse from your nephew,

JEAN.

"P. S.—Jean d'Auray and Co., New Orleans; that is "my address: no one here knows M. de Kéroualle, the gen- "tleman; they only know Jean d'Auray, the merchant."

This letter contained a draft for thirty-thousand francs on a leading Parisian banker.

Clotilde was as moved as her aunt had previously been eat learning, from this tender and devoted letter, of the existence of a brother who for so many years she had believed lost to her. She was astonished at the sudden changes and caprices of fortune, which, after having left her so long without resources, now overwhelmed her with its favors and sent her, in her brother, a second protector, when she had already found one in the duke d'Olona, her future husband.

This draft, which was drawn at eight days sight, very much disturbed Beautrix.

"Rest easy, aunt," said Clotilde, "I will get it cashed at Paris by an intelligent and trustworthy person, for whom I will answer as for myself." And she sent it to Fleurette.

"Promise me," said Beatrix, "that if I do not recover from this illness you will go with your husband to see your brother Jean, my poor nephew."

"What an idea, aunt! You will go there with us."

"God willing! But, after all, if I cannot, swear that you will carry him my last adieux and my blessing! I know him, my poor Jean, and that would give him more pleasure than all his new riches; so you will swear it to me, before God!"

"Yes, aunt; but you are talking too much. So now, silence! We will speak of him again soon, when you have recovered."

Heaven did not realize these hopes. After the second day the crisis which had so frightened the physician assumed a new intensity. A dangerous and mortal eruption soon made its appearance, a disease extraordinary and very rare

at the age of aunt Beatrix. She had not been inoculated in her infancy, and since then the Kéroualle family, like most of the inhabitants of Britany, had always professed an invincible repugnance to vaccination, and all new discoveries in general. There was no longer room for doubt; the small-pox declared itself in all its violence, and Clotilde redoubled her attentions to her poor old aunt, whose death was now certain, as she did not wish to lose any of the last moments of her unfortunate relative, and did not quit her for an instant.

In vain the physician sought to frighten her with the dangers which menaced her; in vain the superior of the convent joined her entreaties to the doctor's; she declared that her place was beside her aunt who had no other relative, that it belonged to her to close her eyes, and that nothing would prevent her from fulfilling that sacred duty: and she kept her word.

Beatrix, overcome by the strength of her disease, was unconscious of her niece's devotion, which, had she been conscious, she would not have premitted. She died holding Clotilde's hand and murmuring her name and that of her poor nephew, Jean.

As to the last sad duties, Clotilde wished that none, besides herself, should be exposed to contagion in rendering them. She alone took charge of everything: she prayed all night beside her aunt's dead body; put her in a shroud with her own hands; and gave orders that a monument should be erected in the interior of the convent where her aunt had so long lived and prayed. This care she committed to the intelligent friendship of the superior, intending, as as soon as her marriage should take place, to return with her husband and kneel on the tomb of her aunt Beatrix, whom she would ask to bless their union.

CHAPTER XV.

CLOTILDE's heart and thoughts both recalled her to Paris. Without apprising Fleurette of her intention, for she did not wish to again disturb the latters occupations, she hastened to take her departure, thinking that there could not well be any inconvenice in her making the journey from Nancy to Paris alone, and by day, on the railroad. But when the train stopped at the station of *Vitry le Francais* what was her astonishment at hearing her own name pronounced! She raised her eyes, and in the train facing her, which had also stopped at the same station on its way from Paris, she recognized a young girl who was holding out her arms towards her at the entrance of one of the cars.

"Open, open, monsieur!" said Clotilde to the only employé who just then happened to be near. The two young girls threw themselves into each other's arms.

"You, god-mother!"

"You, Fleurette!"

"Certainly. I was uneasy about you, god-mother, and I was right. So, when I left the convent, I begged the superior to write to me at once if anything serious occurred, so that I could come and share your trouble with you, and I have arrived too late. But you are here, and as I have quitted my car I will enter yours and return with you to Paris."

All this had been uttered with Fleurette's customary vivacity; and now her god-mother asked her for news of the duke d'Olona and Fleurette answered her anxious inquiries. They retired into a corner of the station and, absorbed by their interesting conversation, neither of them noticed that both of the trains, which wait for nobody, had started on their different ways some time since, the one for Nancy, the other for Paris, and that they were alone in the station.

"Ah! great heavens!" cried out Clotilde, when she discovered their predicament.

"What will become of us?"

"We will go on by the next train," tranquilly said Fleurette.

They questioned an employé of the railway. The first train for Paris would not pass till nine o'clock that night.

"What shall we do till then?" asked Clotilde,

"We can talk."

"Yes," said Clotilde, saddly, "but this delay will cause us to be eight hours late. It is a very long time to have to wait."

"Re-assure yourself, god-mother, we will talk of *him* and the time will pass very quickly, but let us not stay here."

"But where shall we go? you know no one at *Vitry le Francais*."

"No, but let us go to an inn—monsieur," said she to the railway employé, "which is the best inn here?"

"'The Golden Bell,' mademoiselle," and he pointed it out.

The two young girls marched off arm in arm.

"Have these ladies no baggage?" said a railway porter with an interested curiosity.

"I had some," said Clotilde looking around her, but she just then remembered that her trunk, bearing her name and address, had remained in the train and had gone on to Paris without her. "And money!" continued she, "I have none."

"*I* have, god-mother," said Fleurette; "I have thirty-thousand francs about me in bank notes, which I was carrying to your poor aunt."

"Ah! my brother Jean's draft which you have got cashed—"

"And which now belongs to you."

They soon arrived at the "Golden Bell," where the best room in the house was given them. The hostess was curious to know who two such handsome young ladies were, and brought them the hotel register in which to write their names.

"I will only put mine down," said Fleurette in a low tone to her companion. "They need not know that *madame la duchesse* has passed seven or eight hours at their inn."

They had scarcely been there an hour when Clotilde began to feel a heavines of the head, then pain throughout her whole body, next a chill which was followed by a burning fever which developed itself with frightful rapidity. She

could scarcely stand, so Fleurette undressed her, put her to bed, and sent for the best physician in the city, an old practitioner who, by good luck, was a talented man. He would not hazard an opinion, nor commit himself; he frankly acknowleged that he did not as yet know what disease was about to declare itself, but that it threatened to be serious, and the ladies must not think of continuing their journey. This news much distressed Clotilde and greatly increased the violence of her disease.

Fleurette spent the night beside her god-mother, who was light-headed and delirious. She unceasingly pronounced a name which Fleurette knew only too well already, then she called her aunt, her brother Jean and Fleurette.

"Ah!" said the flower-girl, "she summons around her all those she loves, and I alone respond to the appeal."

The delirium still lasted when the doctor arrived next morning: he felt Clotild's pulse and drew back alarmed.

"What is it?" asked Fleurette, with a frightened glance at his face.

"Don't you see?" he answered, pointing to Clotilde's hands, neck and face: "the small-pox!"

"It is impossible!" cried Fleurette in a heart-rending tone.

"That's what it is, and of the most dangerous type; so I advise you, mademoiselle, not to remain here."

"Why not?" asked she astonished.

"Because you will endanger your health and life, and at the least may be disfigured."

"What does that matter?" cried she. "Do I care to be pretty, *I!* But she—" added she sorrowfully to herself.

For three days Clotilde hovered between life and death, unconscious of her disease, her condition, or her danger. Heaven had returned to her the devotion she had lavished upon her aunt by sending to her aid Fleurette, young, active and intelligent, whose indefatigable attentions the physician said, greatly contributed to saving his patient.

When Clotilde recovered consciousness she found herself in a darkened room, from which the light had been excluded as much as possible, and she inquired the cause of it.

"Rest easy, god-mother; it was done in order to protect your sight, which is just now very feeble; don't speak, and

remain quiet. In a few days we will be able to return to Paris, and, until then, let us think of nothing but your recovery."

"But my family, my friends! have you informed them of the accident which has happened to us?"

"Yes, god-mother," answered Fleurette, who had written to nobody; knowing that one can always announce bad news soon enough, and also fearing, justly, to give too much joy to her god-mother's family and too much grief to her poor lover.

The doctor entered. He had followed attentively day by day, and almost hour by hour, the progress of the disease. At each visit his grave and silent air was far from encouraging to poor Fleurette, who scarcely dared to ask him a question. This time a ray of hope shone on his features, and when Fleurette followed him to the door of the ante-chamber he whispered to her:

"I will answer for the patient."

Fleurette uttered a cry, which the doctor admonished her to repress.

"Silence! she must not divine from your joy the danger she has passed through, and which excitement might bring back."

"I will control myself, doctor, and will keep quiet."

"In order to rejoice in full security, we must wait for the ninth day, which is near at hand."

"Two days still! But," said she to the doctor, whom she all the time held by the coat-sleeve, "you will answer for her life?"

"Yes, my child."

"And," continued Fleurette in a voice of emotion, "will you also answer for another treasure, more precious yet, perhaps, to us women—"

The physician hung his head. Then, seeing the grief and fright displayed on the poor girl's features, he said:

"I have known of many persons recovering from this terrible plague without retaining the slightest traces of it."

"You have seen such?" quickly asked Fleurette.

"Yes, my child, and in this case the blood is so young, so pure and so fine that all the probabilities are in favor of the patient."

Fleurette returned to her god-mother joyous and full of hope.

"If heaven ever performed a miracle," she said to herself, "for whom would it do it sooner than for my god-mother?"

She seated herself in her ordinary place near the invalid's couch, admiring Clotilde's angelic calmness and pious resignation.

"Do you suffer yet, god-mother?"

"Still a little."

"And you never complain! *I* would; it relieves one—I would tell my sufferings."

"I do not feel mine!—*You* are here, and I think of *him*."

That day appeared long to Fleurette, and the next longer. It seemed as if the ninth day would never arrive.

At last came the day which Fleurette had so ardently desired and which she now feared. The physician declared the patient entirely out of danger, and Clotilde impatiently demanded that she be permitted to get up and that the light should at last be let in. Fleurette trembled.

"How excited you are!" said Clotilde. "What ails you?"

"*Me*, god-mother? Nothing!"

"Well, then open the shutter."

"Yes, god-mother."

Fleurette, supporting herself with difficulty, approached the window and, with a trembling hand, opened the shutter. The room became light, and Fleurette, casting a glance upon her godmother, uttered a cry and fell to the ground. One might have believed her to be dead.

Clotilde hastened to her relief, placed her in the doctor's hands, and ran to the mantel-piece on which she perceived a bottle. In taking it up she saw herself in the mirror. Astonished, she looked a second time, not believing it was herself she saw reflected in the glass. Then she turned pale, concealed her face in her hands, and cried out: "Ah, Fernand! Fernand!" That was all that escaped her lips. She did not regret her beauty for herself, but for him! She turned away calm and already resigned, supporting with an unaltered front the loss of the greatest fortune that God has

given to women. She perceived Fleurette, whom the doctor had with difficulty brought back to consciousness, and who threw herself sobbing into her god-mother's arms, the latter forced herself to try and console her, but was unable to succeed.

Of so many charms there no longer remained one. So much freshness and beauty had suddenly disappeared. Like the rose-stalk the day after a storm.

The doctor seeking to distract the mind of the convalescent, whom he would not yet permit to go out, brought to her room at the inn all the books and journals he was in the habit of receiving. He also told her the news, among other things which created a great deal of interest just then a frightful railway accident had happened some twelve days back, of which everyone was still speaking. A train on its way to Paris had had a violent collision with another train coming from that city; one of the former's cars had been overthrown and smashed to pieces; the *débris* had taken fire from the flying sparks which had been aggravated by a violent wind. Many passengers had been wounded, some had perished, while others had even totally disappeared in the conflagration, and among these last was said to have been a person whose loss had produced the most painful sensation in the highest circles of Parisian society. This person was mademoiselle Clotilde de Kéroualle.

At this point in the physician's narrative Fleurette trembled; but Clotilde warningly pressed her hand, and made her a sign to keep silent.

"She was a charming young person," continued the doctor, "and was about to be married to the duke d'Olona the handsomest man and richest match in all Paris, a passionate admirer of all that is beautiful, and who espoused this young girl for nothing but her beauty, since she was without any fortune."

Fleurette hastened to ask him how they had learned of mademoiselle de Kéroualle's death.

"In the simplest and, unfortunately, most certain way. On the morning of the day of the accident she had entered the train at Nancy, alone and without a maid, to return to Paris. She had been to Nancy to attend the death-bed of a beloved aunt, she had no other baggage besides a trunk, with

her name and address upon it, and a small box. They have found the trunk and box which no one had reclaimed. As to her, the car which she occupied with two other persons, none of whom escaped, is the very one consumed by the flames!"

Fleurette raised her eyes to heaven in thanks; and said to herself:

"Had it not been for our meeting my god-mother would have been lost!"

"And the duke d'Olona, monsieur?" asked Clotilde, almost afraid to pronounce the name.

"They say that at first he would not believe the news, but that when it was no longer possible for him to doubt he became almost a lunatic. He has gone away, and no one knows where he now is."

Fleurette made a sorrowful gesture which Clotilde signed to her to repress, and, an instant later, the doctor, looking at his watch, arose and took his departure.

"I hope, god-mother," cried Fleurette, "that you are going to write to all your friends instantly, and, if necessary, to all the journals that, thanks be to heaven, the news is false and that you, at least, have not perished in this horrible accident. This should be known at once."

"For what good?" coldly replied Clotilde; "since they all believe me dead, why undeceive them?"

"Gracious God! What do you say? *Dead!*"

"Am I not so, in effect," she said sadly lowering her head, "and what have I to live for, now?"

"And *he*, god-mother, the duke?"

"It is on his account I speak thus, on his account more than anyone else's; an enthusiastic adorer of beauty, he would have married me only on account of mine, as you very well know. It was my only recommendation, and I no longer possess that."

"Your only recommendation!" indignantly cried Fleurette.

"Yes," replied Clotilde excitedly, "my only one in his eyes, for he did not know me; he knew neither my heart nor my sentiments; we have scarcely conversed five minute altogether with each other."

"He shall know them from me, and he will believe me."

"He will believe nothing but his eyes, and when he sees as I am one of two things will happen, Fleurette," said she with energy; "either he will withdraw his word and break off our marriage, and then I should die of shame for myself and for him; or, through respect for his promise or through a point of honor, he will believe himself obliged in the eyes of the world to marry me; he would marry me from kindness and pity, but would never love me, and I should be a constant object of disgust and shame to him. Ah! death is preferable to that. Believing me dead he will bestow upon me a few tears and regrets and will always see me as I was when he lost me, and always seeing me beautiful he will not cease to love me,"

"But you, god-mother, *you!*"

"I!—I will be less unhappy, I will preserve my love for him, and perhaps will not be obliged to withdraw my esteem from him."

Fleurette, who knew the duke's character even better than her god-mother did; and who, in her own case, knew with what facility and promptitude one beauty made him forget another, felt in her heart that her god-mother was right. Thus far Fernand had only been captivated by the exterior charms of his fiancée, and, these being gone, it was to be feared that his love would also depart. If he had only had time to become attached to the solid and durable qualities which she possessed his love would have probably been as lasting as these qualities, but now how make him desire to know them, and, above all, how bring Clotilde to his attention? Just now this was not to be thought of. Hardly recovered from the frightful malady, whose traces were yet fresh, the trial would have been too uncertain yet to risk it. That was the reason why Fleurette was won to Clotilde's idea.

"Well, let it be so, god-mother; since the report of your death has got abroad, unknown to us, let us not yet contradict it; and we will wait till we can find, and I hope it will be before long, an adroit way of bringing about a meeting between you and monsieur le duc, which is all I ask."

"You will see that even at first his antipathy will not be so great as you fear, and the second impression will be all in your favor. Your wit, talent and that irresistible

charm which reigns in you will this time charm him in a surer and more lasting manner than your beauty did before. I have heard it said, god-mother, that when a woman who is—" she hesitated to say the word.

"Ugly," said Clotilde bravely.

"Well, yes," frankly repeated Fleurette, "when an ugly woman once makes herself loved, it is to the extent of adoration."

It is easy to understand why this is so, and it proves that her triumph is due to solid, irresistible qualities unknown to other women, or which those who possess nothing but beauty neglect to acquire.

"No, no, you wish to deceive me by false hopes. Look at that!" said Clotide, pointing to the glass, in which her features lately so handsome were now entirely unrecognizable.

"Well," said Fleurette gaily," it will be a masked ball conquest. I, myself, god-mother, have made such, with the duke, himself, for instance, whom I puzzled and charmed without any great difficulty, and I was far from being like you. Come, come, courage! let us at least make the attempt."

One of Fleurette's most precious qualities was her joyous temperament; which, with her, frequently took the place of philosophy, a kind of philosophy which certainly possessed one great charm, that of being consoling; but all her gaiety often failed her when brought in contact with Clotilde's sadness.

The disease in all its different stages had lasted but twenty days, it was now entirely over, and the doctor had kindly repeated that a few months would suffice, if not to make the trace of it entirely disappear, at least to considerably diminish them. Fleurette had great difficulty in persuading herself to believe this. But, on the other hand, all the troubles Clotilde had successively experienced had greatly enfeebled her, and she had a sharp cough which disquieted the doctor, who, without knowing her name and like all who knew her, had taken a great liking to her.

"You must go and spend three months at Nice," he said to her.

Fleurette was ready to go on the instant.

"No," said her god-mother, "I have already kept you too long from Paris and your business."

"What difference does that make?"

"Even on my account you must return home. Everyone will be astonished at your absence, and your accompanying a young woman everywhere with such devotion would perhaps make the truth suspected. Fleurette," she continued, wiping away a tear, "I must recover my strength in solitude and prayer before daring to attempt the trial you propose to me, before seeing the duke again! Just to think of it! to be unrecognized by him; to say to him; '*It is I!*' and to be repulsed by his looks or his heart, I could not experience it without dying of grief. When I feel brave enough to expose myself to this last and supreme effort I will write you to that effect. Until then I shall stay in Nice, which is an agreeable and hospitable city, in which strangers, even a woman alone, can find an asylum and protection. Our doctor has promised to recommend me to an honorable family in that city, with which he is intimately acquainted. Thanks to my brother Jean I shall not be in need of money. And, besides, I told you the truth, Fleurette, when I got you to learn to write; through that medium we will not be separated. We will write to each other every day."

In vain Fleurette wished to resist. It was the firm and immovable will of her god-mother. She had to give way; and Clotilde, in parting from her, made her solemnly promise that under no pretext would she tell the duke d'Olona that his fiancée still lived.

CHAPTER XVI.

On arriving at Paris Fleurette found all her world very much disturbed, except Michelette to whom from time to time she had sent her orders and recommended silence: but all her adorers, who did not know what had become of her, were very uneasy, Ludovic believed that she had been carried off, and questions rapidly succeeded one another. But

as Fleurette owed an account of her actions to no one and was her own mistress she had no sooner signified that she had no answer to make than all question ceased.

The marquise de Kéroualle, after Géraldine's marriage, had gone to install her son-in-law, M. Kervalec, and wife in their office of Receiver-General and had then returned to Brittany with her only remaining daughter Corentine, who, on learning of Clotilde's death, had triumphantly said:

"I said that her marriage would not take place!"

That was the only epitaph she addressed to the memory of her instructress and cousin.

The duke had manifested great despair. His friends saw that he was half crazy with grief. He could not explain Fleurette's absence, and, she not being there, life in Paris had become unsupportable to him. For some time family affairs had demanded his presence at Madrid and Havana, so he went to Madrid first. From there he had already written Fleurette many letters which had been unanswered. She now hastened to excuse herself; reasons and pretexts did not fail her, for she invented them.

"On learning of her god-mother's death she had wished to hasten to the scene of the disaster; but being herself overtaken with a terrible illness, alone — in a strange inn—etc."

In short, though not very clearly, Fleurette partially explained her absence and silence; but from that time she never let a week pass without writing to the duke, so interested was she in getting news of him to send to her god-mother. Justice must be done the duke: in spite of his fortune he was an excellent young man and possessed a heart of gold; he had recognized Fleurette's sincere affection for him and had given her his own in return. The proof of it was the frankness and confidence which existed in all his letters to her. The first few contained the saddest and most passionate allusions to the memory of poor Clotilde, his eternal love. Two months passed by, and, without saying it, Fernand with his usual frankness let it be seen that although his tenderness was still the same yet his grief was less lively. This was only natural; in a city like Madrid many distractions surround a man of the duke's

age, character and fortune, in spite of himself and almost without his knowing it.

Meanwhile Clotilde, of whom her god-daughter each day asked the latest information in regard to her health, meaning her looks, wrote news to Fleurette which, though better than she expected, was still very sad.

"For two months I have been exceptionally and repulsively ugly; the last (the repulsiveness) alone commences to pass away," wrote Clotilde; "the red spots have disappeared. My desires are not great; I only ask to be ordinarily ugly. I aspire to be one of those plain ones who do not attract attention. My poor aunt frequently said that I was too beautiful; that it was an evil; which, a reasonable woman ought only to desire,' this is her own expression, 'to be free from.' Which means, that her entrance into a *salon* should produce no surprise nor give place to any exclamation of admiration or disgust. Alas! this has not been my fate; I have the unhappiness of never being able to pass unperceived; and of being remarked for my ugliness as much as I formerly was for my beauty."

Clotilde said that she had written to her brother Jean to inform him of their aunt's death and to send the blessing which that the holy woman had in her last moments given to her well beloved nephew. To this brother, now her only friend besides Fleurette, she had told her entire life from her infancy up to the present; the loss of her beauty, and the more than probable and still greater loss of her dreams of happiness. Her letter finished with tender caresses for her dear god-daughter.

Alas! the latter was far from tranquil; for fifteen days she had received no letter from Madrid. Fernand had ceased writing.

Was he ill? Fleurette's friendship made her anxious, for she was almost as devoted to Fernand as she was to her god-mother.

Aside from the fact that she had received no letter from him in some time, another circumstance rendered Fleurette uneasy in regard to Fernand.

M. Henriquez, a young secretary of the Spanish embassy, often came to Fleurette's to purchase bouquets and believed

he had discovered that the coquette always received him and listened to him with a gracious smile, above all when he brought news of the court of Madrid. So he would have invented rather than have had nothing to tell her, and recently he had told Fleurette how the duke d'Olona's sadness had won him the sympathy and interest of all the great ladies at the Spanish capital, and how they endeavored to console him. The last dispatches, it is true, did not say that they had succeeded but everything made it probable, and he would in all likelihood be able to tell her something more definite when he came for his next bouquet.

Fleurette, although furious, had as yet written nothing of this to her god-mother; and one day, about five o'clock, having left Michelette in the shop, she retired to her little *salon* to reflect and become indignant at her ease. Seated with her back to the door and her feet on the andirons, she was thinking how, without letting this news reach her god-mother, she could prevent the evil from becoming any greater; when, all at once, the door behind her was thrown open, some one took hold of her head and covered her forehead with kisses, at which she turned around with indignation and anger, uttered a cry, and let herself fall into the arms of the duke d'Olona, who cried with rapture, while embracing her:

"Fleurette!—my dear Fleurette! It is really you—I see you once more!"

He then went on to tell her that he had received a letter at Madrid from a railway employé, in France couched in the following words:

"If monsieur le duc d'Olona will send fifty napoléons to to M. Brémolard, ex-employé of the Eastern railway at Vitry le-Français now living in Metz, he will receive information of mademoiselle de Kéroualle, his affianced, which he will perhaps believe he has not paid too dearly for."

"Ah! this is fine!" cried Fleurette, "and I already suspected you of forgetting my poor god-mother!" while thus speaking she felt a cold shiver run over her body, but the little *salon* was not yet lit up and the duke was too excited to notice her embarrassment.

"Well?" continued Fleurette.

"Well!" said the duke, "I did not wish to leave to

anyone else the duty of interrogating this employé, so I instantly put myself *en route*. I thought only of her; but on the railway from Madrid one does not travel as rapidly as thought; that will soon come to pass, however, thanks to the new railway from Pampeluna to Saragossa. At length, however, I arrived in Metz and hastened to M. Brémolard.

"'Here', I said to him, 'are fifty napoléons, and more if necessary, speak!'"

"'Monsieur le duc,' he replied, 'I only wish to draw your attention to a particularly strange incident. The car which was crushed and burnt up was numbered 232. The day of the accident the train from Nancy stopped at *Vitry-le-Francais*, where I was then employed; I was the only one just then about the station, and I can swear that a beautiful young gentle-woman, whose description exactly tallies with that which the journals have since given of mademoiselle de Kéroualle, descended from car 232 at that place. I myself opened the car-door at her request, and I will swear that car left without mademoiselle de Kéroualle re-entering it.'"

"'Well!' said I, 'what do you conclude from that?'"

"'That if she left the car at *Vitry-le-Francais* she could not have been where the accident occurred, which was some distance from there and several hours later; and that there is a chance of her being still alive.'"

"'Why,' I said, 'did you not, at the time of the accident, make this statement to the agent at *Vitry-le-Francais* or to your chiefs?'"

"'Because for a long while I have had a grudge against my officers, who have retired me without a pension; and because my statement might perhaps have rendered them a service, and I was not paid for that. But when I learned, later on, from the journals that mademoiselle de Kéroualle was affianced to a rich Spanish nobleman I said to myself: "This information will perhaps have some value for him.'"

"Such was the ex-employé's recital," said the duke, "and that is all I could gather from him. What do you think of it, Fleurette? Of what consequence is it?"

"None!" said Fleurette, who had had time to recover herself, and who understood that an investigation made at *Vitry-le-Francais* would bring about the discovery of

many things. "It is only that some one wished to speculate on your generosity, that is all. If my poor god-mother had stopped anywhere on her journey, if she had got out at *Vitry-le-Francais*, or any other place, she would have taken her trunk and other luggage with her; but, unhappily, it arrived at Paris alone and without her."

"That is true," said the duke.

"And, finally, if she was still alive, in whatever place she might be, what would prevent her from letting us know it?"

"That is so! that is so!" repeated the duke, convinced, "it is absurd, but there *are* absurd hopes which one renounces only with sorrow."

The incident had no further result, and Fleurette hastened to make known to her godmother, and to point out for her recognition, this good trait in Fernand, who, on an indication so uncertain, had instantly abandoned all the temptations of Madrid.

But Madrid was not the only city in the world where there were pretty women and other distractions.

CHAPTER XVII.

Since the duke's return to Paris the recent and romantic remembrance of his proposed marriage had awakened all sorts of hopes and ambitions. He had wished to marry, why might he not wish to again? He had wished to espouse a poor and pretty girl; all those without fortunes immediately began therefore to set their caps at him, which did not prevent the rich ones from doing the same. All the manœuvres of beauty, intrigue and coquetry were put into play to attract his attention and seduce his heart. He was in danger on all sides; from the duchess-dowagers, who fought for their grand-daughters, to the young widows, who fought for themselves. But all the aspirants, whatever their rank or age, without knowing it, encountered a rude adversary in Fleurette. One should have seen with what courage

she defended her god-mother's interests, with what ceaseless attention she foresaw danger, and with what address she turned it aside.

Fortunately, the duke, still sad and weary, seemed to take no pleasure in his life except when he was conversing with Fleurette. He told her, without attaching any importance to them, of the invitations, advances, tendernesses and ardent devotions with which he was overwhelmed, and Fleurette, while treating his self-esteem with caution, laughingly demonstrated to him their interestedness.

"You must," wrote she to Clotilde, "hasten to become beautiful once more, my dear god-mother; but hasten at your leisure, and until then you can rest easy; so long as monsieur le duc has confidence in me nothing is to be feared."

This confidence, of which Fleurette spoke, seemed to increase daily, as also the duke's friendship; twenty times had he wished to occupy himself with the fortune and the future of the flower-girl, but she had proudly recalled to him their previous conditions of friendship.

"You have sworn that you would love me enough not to give me anything, and I count upon your keeping your word."

Fernand respected her pride: he no longer offered her anything, but he made her accept favors without knowing it. This was one of his favorite amusements, amusements fit for a prince. We will cite one among others.

Fleurette's shop was situated on the *boulevard de la Madeleine*, and she had succeeded in making it the fashion; but she foresaw with uneasiness that at the expiration of her lease her proprietor would more than double her rent. This bothered her very much, and the duke in order to reassure her had at first offered her the money necessary to renew the lease. His proposition was so badly received that he did not insist, but, without saying anything about it, he quietly went and purchased the whole house.

Besides her shop, which faced the north, Fleurette had for her own particular habitation, three or four pretty rooms in the *entresol* looking out into the court yard situated on the south side of the house. Unfortunately this court already sufficiently close, was shut in by a wall forty or fifty

feet high which intercepted the sunlight, and Fleurette, like her flowers, could not live without her sun ; it was her joy and happiness. Very frequently her only Sunday recreation was to go at noon and sit in the *Champs-Elysées*.

What was her surprise then when one day she saw masons appear on the top of this very wall! Her enemy gradually sank to the ground under her eyes, discovering to her delighted vision a superb garden, at the end of which arose a pretty little mansion. So henceforth her eyes were constantly rejoiced by verdure and flowers and her windows inundated by waves of light. For some time she went into ecstasies over the providential chance which thus gave her air and space ; but she shuddered when thinking that this advantage, giving a greater value to her appartment, would not only double, but triple the price of her rent.

Wishing to know her fate at once she addressed herself to the principal tenant in regard to renewing her lease. The tenant, a man sixty years of age, made her repeat her name and then gravely named a price much lower than she was already paying. Fleurette looked at him closely, and, suspecting him of an intention which had never entered his head dryly replied :

"Monsieur, here are my intentions : not a cent more and not a cent less than the actual rent. Does that suit you ?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," he answered, astonished, "but I am not ordered to rent it so high ; and I must inform you that I shall be obliged to include in your lease the possession of the garden in front, I cannot let it otherwise."

"And why is that, if you please ?"

"Because these are the formal orders which I have received from the new proprietor, whose letter on the subject I was reading when you entered, and I have not had time to finish it."

He looked on his desk for a letter which he read over again.

"Ah! gracious!" cried he, greatly troubled, "he recommends me to do all this with great address, and above all not to mention *him*."

He had scarcely finished, when Fleurette tore the letter from his hands and read at the bottom of the page the name : *duke d' Olona*.

"Very well, monsieur," said she throwing the letter back on his desk, "I will arrange with the proprietor himself."

That evening she created a scene with Fernand, who supported her reproaches with a heroic *sang-froid*.

"I will put my rents at whatever price I choose. *Your's* shall be diminished one half and, if you say a word *entirely*. I am the master, that is to be; and if you are not satisfied, send the sheriff's officers to me."

"I will send them!" said she in a rage.

"I defy you to!"

She looked in his face, began to laugh, and ended by throwing herself into his arms, crying out at the same time:

"Vanquished, my noble duke!—I acknowledge myself vanquished! but," said she, threatening him with her finger, "don't let it happen again!"

He held out his hand to her, and peace was made.

One more such act should be related, as it is not entirely foreign to the concluding part of this recital.

Early one morning Fleurette had descended sad and discouraged to the shop; she had been thinking of her godmother nearly all night. When Michelette arrived *she* was wiping her eyes.

"And you also are sad, my poor girl!" said Fleurette, "what is the matter?"

Michelette, who was an excellent girl, told her of a sad sight she had just witnessed: she had for neighbors, on the fifth floor mansard in which she lived, a poor paralytic woman and her husband, an old soldier, minus a leg and arm!—"And in spite of all that," continued Michelette, "they had been for some time the happiest people in the world!"

"How is that?" inquired Fleurette, much astonished.

"They had a son; a charming fellow, active, intelligent and laborious, who was in the merchant service, and all he earned he gave his parents, whom he supported. At last, thanks to his good conduct and recognized talents, he was about to obtain a position as—it is very difficult to pronounce—super-cargo I believe they call it, and his father's and mother's future was assured."

"Well!" said Fleurette, "where is the misfortune?"

"This he is twenty-one. He arrived from Havre yesterday to be present at the conscription, and he has drawn number *two*. All is lost. He must go.—Early this morning I entered the home of his despairing parents, and what do you think I saw? The old soldier wished to throw himself out of the window, as then his child would be the only son of a widow, and would not have to leave home."

Fleurette uttered a cry of horror.

"And how much money will it take to get him off?" she quickly asked.

"Three thousand francs, his father said. Is it to be dreamt of? Is it possible?"

"I haven't that much," said Fleurette, regarding her secretary. "And if God does not come to our aid—"

At that moment the well known trot of a horse was heard on the boulevard, and it stopped before the shop. The animal faithful to his habits, did not think of passing by without making his customary halt. A cavalier dismounted, and entered the shop.

"You, monsieur le duc," cried Fleurette, "and so early."

"Yes; I was in a detestable humor and could not sleep all night, so I got up early and am going to make a tour of the *bois* in search of health and happiness."

"You need not go so far to find them," said Fleurette. And then, without further preamble and looking him in the face with a smile the duke never knew how to resist, she went on: "Monsieur le duc. I have sworn never to ask for myself; but I did not swear that I would not ask for others who are unfortunate, and I now need, this very instant even, an enormous sum.

"How much?"

"Three thousand francs!"

He took a pen and paper from the counter, and prepared to write.

"Listen!" cried Fleurette, "that you may at least know what it is for."

"If you know, Fleurette, that is sufficient. It must be for an honest and praiseworthy purpose."

"Yes, but it is right that you should know, so listen." And she related to him what she had just learned from Michelette. While she was doing this the duke drew a

check on his banker, but in place of *three* he wrote *four*, and smilingly handed the paper to Fleurette.

"Ah!" cried she, seeing his contented air, "ah!—your good humor has returned to you, as I said it would.—Now, monsieur le duc, continue your ride, it will be a pleasant one. You can think of the happiness you have created and which will bring blessings upon you."

As Fernand went off at a gallop Fleurette turned to Michelette, and said:

"Good news never arrives too soon. Tell me where your poor friends live?"

"In the same house I do; M. Rémy, fifth floor."

"I am going there," said Fleurette. "Finish opening the shop."

She put on a shawl and hastened off. In a quarter of an hour she was at the house Michelette lived in.

"M. Rémy?" she inquired of the conciérge, who was scarcely awake yet. "Fifth floor, first door to the left."

She hastily mounted the stairs and arrived at the fifth floor all out of breath. Although a key was in the door indicated she knocked, and at the response "Enter!" she opened it, not expecting the sight which presented itself to her eyes.

There was no other furniture in this room besides a chair and a cot. On the latter was seated a handsome young man apparently from eighteen to twenty years old. He was bareheaded and doubtless was dreaming for he scarcely noticed the door open. His reveries could not have been pleasant, for great tears shone in his handsome large black eyes and ran down his cheeks. He clasped his hands together in a convulsive manner, praying with fervor and doubtless calling on some good angel to come to his aid, and he ought to have believed himself answered on seeing the head of the young girl who had opened the door. Fleurette had stopped, motionless and surprised, her hand still resting on the key and her body half outside the door.

"Monsieur Rémy?" asked she, in a timid voice.

"I am he, mademoiselle."

"The former soldier?"

"That is my father—the door further on."

"I was going to him, but first," and she advanced into

the room, "learn that you will not have to go away, you are exempted."

"That is impossible!" and he made a movement which she hastened to repress with her hand.

"It is possible, and the proof of it," she continued, throwing on his cot a small piece of paper, "is that here is a check for four thousand francs on a Spanish banker, *rue Saint Georges.* Run quick and get it cashed.—It is not I, monsieur, whom you must thank," she added, "but the duke d'Olona, a noble lord; he alone merits your gratitude, and that of your family."

And as, bewildered, beside himself, the young man was about to throw himself at her feet, she reclosed the door and disappeared. Poor Rémy carried his hand to his forehead.

"It was," he muttered to himself, "an angel, a dream, a vision!"

Meanwhile a paper was lying on his cot, and the words on it: "*Good for four thousand francs,*" signed, "*d'Olona,*" told him that the dream was a reality, and the angel the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

The next day Fleurette saw hasten into her shop a young and handsome fellow, slender, active and vigorous, with the air of a sailor, an erect head, proud eye, and joyous air; M. Urbain Rémy. The day before, having cashed his check, he had hastened to the duke's whom he had not found at home. He had returned there again on the same day in order to express all his gratitude and to say to the duke that he belonged to him body and soul. The duke had replied that it was to Fleurette he owed his thanks, for it was she who had pleaded for him. Urbain was not ungrateful, and felt thankful to both. The duke had then conversed with him and had found him talented and intelligent, with a desire to get on in the world; and as Fleurette's protégés were his own he had recommended him to a trans-Atlantic steamship company, of which he was one of the principal shareholders.

If the poor young man had been charmed with Fleurette in morning dress yesterday in his garret how much more so was he on seeing her inside her marble counter in an elegant and coquettish toilet, and surrounded at the moment

by half a dozen young noblemen, whose servants and horses awaited them in the street. He took her for a great lady, and almost mute and speechless he with difficulty murmured a few words of thanks which Fleurette graciously listened to but which she scarcely heard. The young secretary of the Spanish embassy, Don Henriquez, had come to announce important events to her.

Urbain withdrew dreaming. His mother, on seeing him so sad, could scarcely believe him the bearer of such good news.

Meanwhile Ludovic, remaining near Fleurette, had upon this day redoubled his ardor and gallantry. He played a strange and inexplicable rôle, unless love was the explanation of it all. Since the day when he had been, as he said, fooled by Fleurette, he had detested, then forgiven her; then detested her again, proclaiming publicly that for nothing in the world would he attach himself to the chariot of such a coquette, and each day, without acknowledging it to himself, he loved her better than ever. The duke d'Olona's first attentions had thrown him into transports of despair and rage, all the greater that he believed himself bound in honor to play the part of indifference towards her. Now he was convinced, not that Fleurette had fooled with the duke, who, amidst all his familiarity, had so much true friendship and sincere respect for her that there was no reason for suspecting such a thing; but he did believe, as did all the world to its own great astonishment, that nothing had passed between them but what could be acknowledged in broad daylight. This belief allowed Ludovic to cease dissimulating any longer, and he declared himself anew the adorer of Fleurette, a pretention at which the duke was in no wise offended, and of which he was apparently unconscious. On this day, then, Ludovic was more assiduous and pressing than ever. He believed that he had rendered Fleurette thoughtful; she was simply wearied and preoccupied.

Don Henriquez had announced to her, under the seal of secrecy, that there was a rumor at the Spanish embassy of a marriage between the duke d'Olona and a charming young person half Spanish and half French. Many times already had Fleurette heard similar reports, but it was from the duke himself that she had heard them. He had not spoken

to her of this one, and yet it was noised abroad, and she had not seen him since yesterday morning. Two whole days without seeing him! This disturbed her very much on her god-mother's account, whose bulletins also were far from reassuring.

"I look at myself in vain," she wrote, "I cannot yet recognize myself; still there is a little progress; I was frightful, and positively I am now only ugly."

One can judge whether, in Fleurette's present state of mind, she would receive Ludovic's tender propositions kindly. Everyone else had gone away, and she hoped that he would also; but seeing that he remained and that he continued his gallantries she stopped him, and said:

"Monsieur, the state of ignorance in which I so long lived might perhaps have excused in me inconsistency; but now I would be without excuse. Either the love you speak of is pretended or it is sincere. In the first case, I am too adroit to allow myself to accept it; in the second, too honest to encourage it, for I shall always remain as I am, alone here with Michelette, or I shall quit it only to be married, which would be agreeable, monsieur, neither to you nor to me."

Ludovic did not appear so very much disconcerted at this blow, received in full front; he bowed respectfully and went away.

The next day Fleurette's uneasiness increased, yet another day and the duke had not appeared. Urbain came, it is true, to buy a bouquet of violets for his mother, which he attentively examined for some time while he talked with Michelette and looked at Fleurette. He finally risked addressing a word to her, and announced that on the recommendation of the duke d'Olona he had been appointed a mate on the fine iron steamship, Christopher Columbus, carrying the mail and passengers from Havre and Southampton to St. Thomas, an excellent position which was worth four or five thousand francs a year to him, without counting perquisites.

Fleurette took great interest in his good fortune, sincerely rejoicing over it; but in reality she understood very little about it as she was thinking of something else. It was the third day that had passed without her seeing the duke.

During the day she received a letter from madame Du-

russel, the ex-court jeweller, Ludovic's mother, who begged her to come and see her at once, that very day, no matter at what hour. It was doubtless some order for flowers for a grand ball or *fete*, and when five o'clock, six o'clock, seven o'clock had struck, that is to say when there was no longer any hope of her seeing the duke arrive, for he never came any later than that, she concluded to go to madame Durussel's.

It was night when she knocked at the door of the latter's mansion, where she had not been for a long time. Nevertheless, she recognized it perfectly well. Her heart beat in remembrance and, alas! in fright, when she thought that without the providential meeting with her god-mother here would have been the tomb of her happiness, and her whole future. In comparing the life she now enjoyed, the fortune, consideration and friendship which surrounded her, with the misery, shame and contempt which would have been the necessary consequences of the fault of her inexperience, she therein found new reasons for thanking Providence, for loving her god-mother, and for devoting herself, in her turn, to procuring another's happiness.

This time she ascended, not the little detached stair-case which led to M. Ludovic's apartments, but by the grand stair-way which conducted to those of his mother.

The latter was alone: she was pale, and had a depressed and suffering air.

"Mademoiselle," said she to Fleurette, pointing with her hand to a seat. "I have begged you to come to-day because my son is absent from Paris and will not return until to-morrow."

Fleurette wondered what was the need of this precaution; but she said nothing, and continued silently to listen.

"Mademoiselle," said madame Durussel slowly, and weighing her words. "I prefer approaching the question frankly. You know what it is about."

"I have not the slightest suspicion of it, madame," replied Fleurette, who was beginning to get impatient at the other's solemn manner.

"That appears to me rather difficult of belief," replied the mother with bitterness; "I will apprize you of it. My son, forgetting all he owes the world, his position, and me,

his mother, dared to declare to me yesterday that he wished to marry you!"

"Oh, pshaw!" cried Fleurette, struck with surprise, "*He!* —marry *me!*—It is impossible."

"But I tell you it is true," majestically repeated the mother.

"Eh, well!" cried Fleurette gaily, "I would not have believed him capable of it; it is a fine action, which greatly recommends him to me."

"One moment, mademoiselle, one moment!" said madame Durussel, seeking to smother her wrath, "do not triumph yet, and condescend only to listen to me."

"As long as you please, madame!" And she arranged herself comfortably in her seat, while madame Durussel sank back into her's.

"Mademoiselle," continued the latter, "with a person as clever as you I will not employ ordinary means. There is no reasoning with my son; one might speak to him vainly of proper sentiments, customs and maternal love, he would not listen; but I hope to find you more accessible to my arguments. I shall only employ one."

"You will give me great pleasure," answered Fleurette, who at the same time murmured to herself: "it will be less tedious than I feared."

"Mademoiselle," said madame Durussel in a lofty and authoritative voice; "you do not love my son."

"I was about to tell you so, madame," frankly said Fleurette.

"I was sure of it!" cried madame Durussel, with a triumphant air.

"Eh, well! mademoiselle," and she lowered her voice, "this ought only to be known us two, and certainly not by Ludovic: if you will give up marrying my son, I will give you here, this very instant, *twenty-thousand francs* in cash!"

Fleurette felt a thrill of indignation, which suddenly quieted down and interpreted itself by a slight smile.

This disdainful air did not escape madame Durussel, who thought that she might not have offered enough.

"Eh. well! mademoiselle, *thirty-thousand francs!*"

Fleurette remained unmoved.

"*Forty!*" cried the furious mother.

Fleurette answered not a word.

Madame Durussel took a pocket-book from the drawer, and approached Fleurette.

"Take time to reflect; this is my limit, beyond which I shall not go. If you do not accept, you will repent your obstinacy. *Fifty-thousand francs!*" said she in a voice which anger rendered almost unintelligible, "FIFTY THOUSAND—"

And, holding out the port-folio, she awaited, trembling from emotion and anguish, Fleurette's decision.

"Madame," said the latter in a voice fresh, pure, and slightly sarcastic, "I thank you for the sum you are so willing to place at my disposal; but as it has never been my intention to marry monsieur, your son, and as I never shall marry him, I cannot conscientiously accept the *wedding present* you offer me. I am too honest a girl for that!"

"Is it possible!" cried the madame Durussel, stupified: "why only yesterday my son declared he would marry you in spite of me!"

"But not in spite of *me*, madame," responded Fleurette, with dignity: "You will condescend to acknowledge that my consent is as necessary as yours, and I refuse it."

She made a profound reverence and disappeared, leaving madame Durussel, pocket-book in hand, now (who can pretend to understand the eccentricities of the maternal heart?) almost indignant that a grisette had dared to refuse her son.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FLOURETTE was still without news of the duke and in her uneasiness, was about sending to his house for information when a note arrived for her. It ought to have been delivered much sooner, but the servant charged with delivering it had profited by his master's absence to go on a frolic which had proved so agreeable that he had kept it up for two whole days. He had employed the third in getting sober and in recalling to his mind the duties with which he had been

charged. He now came to beg Fleurette not to get him discharged. She quickly opened the letter, written at the moment of the duke's departure, which contained only these words:

"My good Fleurette, business and necessity compel me "to go to Havre; I will return in four or five days."

Thus all the marriage rumors fell to the ground. But why this journey to Havre? Patience! She would know before long.

The next day, which was Sunday, as she no longer needed to go away from home to find plenty of air and light, from the window of her bed-room and *salon* in the *entresol* she contemplated the lawn and the baskets of flowers which shone in the sun and gladdened her eyes. To whom did she owe this comfort, this constant happiness? To *him!* She was thinking of him when he entered.

He said that he had arrived too late the evening before to come to Fleurette's, but early enough to finish his evening in three or four great houses, and had everywhere heard related the adventure (which madame Durussel herself had made public) of the pretty flower-girl's refusing a son of good family, who had thrown himself at her feet, and fifty thousand francs, which had been thrown at her head. Every one was in ecstasies over her loyalty and disinterestedness, everyone except the duke d'Olona, who cried out:

"It does not astonish me. Fleurette is Ninon de Lenclas, *plus* bouquets and virtue."

"Enough of this! answer me first. What means this journey to Havre and these rumors of marriage?"

"Who has told you of it?" asked he with surprise.

"It is true then!" said she turning pale.

"Yes," he frankly replied; "but what astonishes and grieves me is that you have learned it from any other than me. I was just coming to consult you on this subject, Fleurette," said he holding out his hand to her, "and to talk it over with you as one friend does with another."

There was no getting angry at such excessive confidence; she therefore resigned herself to it and sat down beside him on the divan, where he had thrown himself, and listened to him in silence.

"You can see, Fleurette, that the life I lead wearies me;

to feel around one's self and one's fortune traps, snares, and feminine plots; to distrust all kind looks and tender affections; and not to be able to clasp with confidence any pretty hand, except yours, Fleurette (and he pressed it to his lips), is almost not to live. I said as much to the count de Castel-Mayor, my father's brother and my only relative, the richest land-owner in Havana, who was just then in Paris on business concerning us both."

"'Eh, well! if that is the case,' he replied to me, 'why not get married my dear nephew?'"

"I told him that such had been my intention, and how I was to have married some months back an adorably beautiful person, who had been taken from me, and whose memory would always be dear to me."

"'Listen!' said he, 'have you sworn to remain faithful to her memory all your life?'"

"'I do not say that; but up to the present no one has been able to make me forget her.'"

"Good, monsieur le duc," cried Fleurette.

"Do you know what my uncle replied? Why this:"

"'Nephew, I once knew a woman who, after the loss of her husband, wished, in her despair, to let herself starve to death. She was a friend of mine, so I went to her and said: "If you intend never to eat, well and good; but if you intend to eat again some day believe me that you might as well commence right away." She believed me, and we made a charming dinner. What I said to her, nephew, I say to you; if you intend to marry at some future day, why not now, while you are young and everything smiles upon you; while good opportunities present themselves; and while I have an admirable one to propose to you. I have left an only daughter at Havana, to whom I shall soon return. She is seventeen years old, your cousin, and her name is Giuseppa. I will say nothing of our fortune for you are even richer than we are. But they say that you love beauty, and Giuseppa is the most beautiful girl in the colony; I am not the only one who thinks so, for all of our inhabitants think likewise and have christened her the "Spanish Goddess." Such a marriage, which would certainly meet with your father's approval were he alive, would greatly help the interests which now occupy us and consolidate our two

families into one. I say nothing of my happiness, at this moment, Fernand, I am only thinking of yours.' "

"My uncle ceased speaking, and awaited my response. I felt that what he had proposed was only reasonable, I found no serious objection to it, and yet I hesitated and remained silent."

"'Your intended was very beautiful, then?' asked my uncle."

"'Admirable!' I replied."

"'And you loved her?'"

"'Certainly.'"

"'And she, on her side, loved you?'"

"At this question, Fleurette, I examined my memory and I was obliged to admit that it recalled nothing to me that would prove she had loved me; in fact, I had scarcely ever spoken with her or heard the sound of her voice. And when my uncle, continuing his interrogations, questioned me in regard to her sentiments, her qualities and her talents I for the first time perceived that all that I had known of my future wife was her marvellous beauty, which had so seduced and fascinated me that I desired nothing else, asked for nothing more."

One may imagine Fleurette's anguish while the duke was speaking thus. What he said was all true. He had only loved Clotilde for her beauty, and it no longer existed.

"And," said she trembling, "where is M. de Castel-Mayor, your uncle, now?"

"He has left. I went with him as far as Havre, where he embarked for Havana. We were obliged to wait for the mail steamer, which at this season leaves only on the 1st. and 15th. of each month. During this time he redoubled his entreaties with me."

"Well!" said Fleurette anxiously, "and what answer did you give him?"

"That I required time for reflection and to consult my friends; you see, Fleurette, that I thought of you."

"'Never mind, nephew,' my uncle replied, 'no one compels you. But for some time past, and for other important reasons, you ought to have come to Havana, where you are anxiously expected. I ought to take you with me, to-day, but I will give you time for reflection. You can take

passage on the next steamer, that of the 15th. of this month, and can bring me your decision in person, and if you are still in doubt and hesitate you will hesitate no longer, I assure you, after seeing your cousin. I will expect you then at Havana.'"

"'I will come.'"

"'You give me your word?'"

"'Yes, uncle.'"

"He grasped my hand on it, and that is how we separated. Now, Fleurette, that you know all give me your advice."

It would be difficult to describe all Fleurette had successively experienced while Fernand was relating with so much confidence and frankness the propositions of his uncle. Unfortunately it all appeared so reasonable that she sought in vain some successful way in which to defend the absent one, she could only think of one, she could say:

"*Clotilde still lives and loves you!*"

But how could she do this without her god-mother's consent. And besides had not this means, which would have formerly been so powerful, lost all its value? But when the duke spoke of going away in fifteen days, of going to Havana, and of establishing himself there, she no longer trembled for her god-mother only. She comprehended, from the grief she experienced on her own account, how dear Fernand was to her; she had such intense gratitude and affection for him, that, had he known it, would have made him as contented with such a friendship as if it had been love. This friendship inspired her with the most persuasive of all eloquent actions; she felt as if her heart was breaking, and burst into tears.

"Fleurette!" cried the duke, embracing her, "what ails you?"

"You can ask me that when you wish to leave me forever, when you are going beyond the seas to seek a woman you do not know, or whom you only know from her father's interested description; and, as beautiful as she may be, if she does not make you happy, a thing which constantly happens, to whom will you confide your troubles? Who will console you in your disappointment? I cannot go and sell flowers in Havana!—Ah!" cried she, clasping her

hands and falling at his feet, "don't go away, I beg you!" She was on her knees before him, and great tears rolled down her cheeks, ordinarily so laughing and fresh.

Of all methods of pleading her god-mother's cause this was perhaps not the least adroit. Fernand, moved and troubled, could no longer find in his turn a single good reason for going away, and contented himself with silently pressing Fleurette's hand. A secret instinct told the young girl that he commenced to repent his promise.

"And after all," said she, wiping her eyes and sitting down beside him, "where is the necessity for a man of your age, rank and fortune to get married in such a hurry, as if he had to pay a notary's fee to-morrow? Great families persecute you with offers of their alliance, and beautiful women wish to receive wedding-rings from you; so declare distinctly that you love them all, but will marry nobody. After that declaration of independence, all the worse for those who venture to the attack, it will be at their own risk and peril."

While speaking the smile had returned to her lips and gaiety shone in her eyes; the duke contemplated her with an inexpressible pleasure, and profiting by her advantages, she laughingly continued:

"There is no embarrassment but your fortune! Rest easy, I will climb roofs and indicate to you, as on the other day, poor people to succor and unfortunate ones to console, I will make you a blessing to all the unhappy; I shall not fail, and will ruin you, I promise you; trust to me for that!"

"Fleurette," cried the Duke, tendering her his hand, "you are a brave girl, and one who gives good advice; certainly," continued he dreamily, "if Clotilde still lived, I would expect to find happiness in a union with her; but she is lost to me forever,—so I must choose between two counsellors; my uncle who is wise, advises marriage; and you—"

"Who am still wiser," said Fleurette, "advise bachelorship!"

"That has only one inconvenience, it condemns me to solitude and ennui." He stopped a moment, reflected, and then went on; "still I will accept it on one condition."

"What?" asked Fleurette quickly.

"Listen," said he taking her hand, "you are the gentlest and most amiable girl in the world, and to my eyes these are the least of your good qualities,—"

"Thanks, monsieur le duc."

"Up to the present time you have been my devoted friend—well! be still more; and I," continued he loyally, "finding in you the fulfillment of all my desires, will swear, on the faith of a gentleman *never* to get married!"

Fleurette uttered a cry and, by a movement quicker than thought threw herself into his arms; then, turning pale and her lips trembling, she drew back. The duke hastened after her, but she softly waved him off.

"You hesitate?" said he, with fear.

"No," she answered with an expression of contentment, "a single regret darkens my joy; it is that if I am your's to-day, after to-morrow I shall never see you again."

"Why not?"

"Because, to-morrow," continued she energetically, "I should drown myself!"

"What are you thinking of!" cried the duke frightened.

"Yes, there was one whom I love, not better than, but, as well as you; my good and beautiful god-mother. And even when so much beauty no longer exists, to rob her of what belongs to her, what she loved, is such a crime in my eyes—that I should never forgive myself if I did it.—And you, yourself, monsieur le duc," said she in a penetrating voice, "who are too loyal, would you, although you are free, have nothing to reproach yourself with in becoming faithless to the memory of your poor fiancée?"

"Stop!" said the duke, turning away his head.

"Judge then if I, who owe her all—"

"Stop!" he repeated with emotion; then taking her hand and speaking as if to a frightened child he was trying to re-assure, he said; "Fleurette, my good Fleurette, like all ardent hearts and lively imaginations you rush to extremes. Fear nothing, I know how to respect your griefs and remembrances." Then wiping away with his lips the tears which were still rolling down the flower-girl's cheeks, he continued; "Let us wait awhile. Already as a friend you have given yourself to me—"

"Body and soul," said the young girl fervently.

"And never," replied Fernand with equal warmth, "shall I give up such rights, no matter what may happen. As to what I was so ambitious as to dream of, and which so greatly frightened you," said he, smiling, "take time to think of it, my Fleurette, and let not your friendship for the past forever darken the future. Meanwhile, I will make the voyage to Havana, because I have promised to, but by doing so I do not intend to bind myself to anything. The marriage which your friendship fears for me is neither decided upon nor is it to be feared, since a word from you, as you know, will always be able to prevent it."

He then tenderly embraced her, saying; "I will see you again soon!" and went away much affected, leaving poor Fleurette in a still greater state of emotion.

CHAPTER XIX.

After the duke's departure Fleurette's calmness and reason returned to her. She understood that there was but one thing to do; she must write to her god-mother at once and tell her all that Fernand had said to her, with the exception of his last proposition. Clotilde must permit her to declare to the duke that his betrothed still lived, as that was the only way of preventing the voyage to Havana and the marriage with mademoiselle de Castel-Mayor, the "Spanish Goddess," the only way of escaping forever from other dearer alliances which Fleurette dared not consider, and the prospct of which gave her the vertigo. She could scarcely believe that all that had happened was real. She had been generous, magnanimous and heroic; but she did not deceive herself, and felt that she needed all her heroism to help her, otherwise she could answer for neither his, nor her own, strength. So she had resolutely taken up her pen and was about to write to her god-mother when Mich-

elette entered with a letter from that very person. It contained only these words;

"I shall arrive in Paris Monday, at two o'clock, by the Lyons railway; meet me at the station."

Fleurette kissed the letter, and said to herself;

"As usual, my god-mother comes to the aid of her poor Fleurette in a dangerous moment."

The next day at the hour appointed she was at the Lyons station with a carriage, awaiting Clotilde, who was not long in making her appearance. Alas! she could now venture into Paris without fear of being known. Of all those who had formerly admired her brilliant and splendid beauty none would have now been able to recognize her, except Fleurette, who hastened to meet and to embrace her.

"You recognize me, then!" exclaimed Clotilde. But seeing the tears which glistened in Fleurette's eyes she continued, with a sorrowful smile; "you did *not* recognize me, you guessed it was I!"

They entered the carriage, and on their way Clotilde told how she had received an answer from her brother, the count de Kéroualle, or rather Jean d'Auray, the merchant; a letter so full of tenderness that she had cried while reading it. She had informed him of their aunt's death, and the loss of her own beauty and her *fiance;* and in the brother whom she had never seen she had found the tenderest friend, the most devoted protector and the most ingenious and delicate of consolers. He begged her to come to him, who would always find her beautiful; to him who would always love her; and to him whom she could give once more happiness and a family.

"Well!" said Fleurette, "and what do you intend to do?"

"My place is with my brother."

"You have another duty to perform, god-mother."

"Towards whom?"

"Towards your *fiance!* Only yesterday he said to me; Ah! if Clotilde lived, I would find happiness in a union with her:"

"Is it possible!" cried the poor girl with a joy which approached delirium.

"Yes; but, finding himself forced to give you up, he may end by forgetting you: the beauties who surround him are so coquettish and perfidious." And seeing that Clotilde regarded her with a frightened air she went on smiling, though sighing at the same time, "Not all, god-mother! but after all—"

"Finish, I beg of you!"

Fleurette then related to her the projects of the Havana uncle, carefully keeping back however that a word from herself would serve to frustrate them; she felt that her god-mother would not be more than half grateful were her *fiance* saved at such a price.

"And your advice, Fleurette?" asked Clotilde, much disturbed.

"Is this; I would tell him on the first occasion and with as little awkwardness as possible, as a strange history which I had read in a journal, of your aunt's death, your devotion—your pretended death—and then, little by little, I would acknowledge the truth to him."

"All?" said Clotilde, trembling.

"The whole of it, god-mother. It is necessary."

"Oh! no, not yet!—I could not like him to be too surprised— too frightened—"

"What are you thinking of!" cried Fleurette, indignant at that expression.

"That is the right word. I would like that before learning our history he should meet me once or twice by chance, without knowing who I am you understand, so that he could become somewhat accustomed to my new face; and I, on my side, would like to know what effect it has produced upon him."

"That can all be arranged as soon as we are at home."

"Where are you taking me?"

"*Where*, god-mother? why to my own apartment, of course—I mean yours. I have an apartment, in the *entresol*, looking on the court, where no one shall see you, no one wait on you, but myself; it has a private entrance, not through the shop, but by the carriage entrance—and see, we have arrived."

A few minutes later, and Clotilde was installed in her god daughter's apartments. Even in the rich and sumptu-

ous d'Olona mansion mademoiselle de Kéroualle could not have been served with more care and attention than she was at Fleurette's. The flower-girl constantly quitted her flowers and customers to run up the private staircase to see if her god-mother wished any service.

Clotilde had related to her the flourishing condition of her affairs. In the last six months she had expended scarcely any of the thirty-thousand francs her brother had sent her, and he had just sent another letter of credit on his banker, M. Newton, rue Caumartin. Jean d'Auray had recommended to the latter's care his sister mademoiselle Jeanne Clotilde d'Auray, who would soon come to rejoin him at New Orleans; he begged M. Newton to obtain a passport for her, to fulfill all the necessary formalities, and finally to place at her disposition whatever amount of money she might need.

"The day after her arrival Clotilde wished to pay her first visit to her banker. Her toilet was of the simplest, she was in black, still wearing mourning for her aunt. It was the middle of the day when she descended by the private stairway which led from the *entre-sol* to the shop; she was conversing with Fleurette concerning their projects and methods for meeting with the duke d'Olona without his suspecting anything, when all at once Fleurette began to tremble.

"What is the matter?" asked Clotilde.

"His carriage has just stopped on the boulevard!" cried Fleurette turning her head towards the door. "He will be here in an instant."

"Oh, heavens! what is to become of me?"

"This is the very occasion we were seeking; it presents itself, and must be seized upon. Come, recover yourself. Courage, god-mother!"

The duke entered. Clotilde turned quickly towards the back of the shop, and appeared to be examining some rare flowers under glass frames.

The duke went up to Fleurette; but perceiving a woman of elegant figure and distinguished appearance he stopped. As she turned her back upon him he made a signal of curiosity to Fleurette which seemed to say: "Who is this beautiful lady?"

Clotilde seemed riveted to the same spot, and could not persuade herself to quit the flowers which she had already too long admired. At last, collecting all her strength, and her heart beating with terrible anguish, she decided to turn around.

The duke, saluting her respectfully, bowed his head for an instant, then raised it with curiosity. Too perfect a gentleman not to be completely master of himself, he regarded the stranger with an amiable and gracious air; nothing in his eyes, nor in any of his actions, had betrayed, or allowed to be suspected, his impressions; so that Fleurette and Clotilde were both happy at this first meeting, Clotilde being the most so, and she responded with a gracious bow to that of the duke, and hastening to quit the shop she disappeared on the boulevard.

The duke threw himself into a chair, near a table, on which stood a camelia whose beautiful white flowers he spitefully plucked. Fleurette glided rapidly towards him to hear the decisive judgment which was about to fall from his lips.

"*There* is a poor young lady who is admirably ugly!" he smilingly murmured.

Fleurette stood thunderstruck and confounded. The sentence was severe. It was true that that forehead, those pure features, and that velvet skin had been stricken by a plague which had everywhere left its traces, but Clotilde had still remaining her beautiful figure, her elegant form, and, best of all, her magnificent eyes and teeth.

The duke seemed to withdraw his first decision, for he added an instant later:

"It is a pity! for she has a figure and appearance which are—"

"Admirable!" interrupted Fleurette, hoping to make him change his opinion.

"Yes; masked she would be the most beautiful woman in Paris. Who is she?"

"Mademoiselle Jeanne d'Auray, sister of a New Orleans Merchant."

"You know her.

"Very well. She was an intimate friend of my godmother, who greatly esteemed her. All that know her say

that she has an angelic character and an admirable mind, the most precious and desirable union of qualities in a woman."

"Ah!" said Fernand, with satisfaction, "so much the better! That is a great offset, for she is very ugly."

"Well! monsieur le duc," cried Fleurette spitefully, "all who have known her for some time quickly forget her appearance, and cannot comprehend how she can be found ugly, there is such a kindness and charm in her eyes, which, by the way," said she sturdily, "have always remained superb."

"How, *always!* " cried the duke, laughing; "is she so very old then?"

"No; one can easily see that she is young by her smile alone, which has so much youth and sweetness; and her teeth are like pearls."

"I did not see them."

"All the worse for you!" said Fleurette, dryly; "but what you could not divine are her talents. If you could see the marvels which have been wrought by her needle, her pencil and her brush; if you could see her fingers run over the piano; if you could hear the brilliancy and lightness of her voice; and, which is of still greater value, if you could know her charitable, elevated and delicate sentiments, and above all her modesty; which is so great that no one suspects her grand qualities."

"Ah! truly," said the duke indifferently, "is she such a very remarkable person as all that indicates? "

"I will swear it to you!" she responded with a warmth she had difficulty in moderating.

"I believe you, Fleurette, I believe you!"

He seemed to reflect and, after a momentary silence, he cried:

"All the same, she is very ugly!"

This was all Fleurette had been able to obtain.

Such was the result of the first interview between Fernand d' Olona and Jeanne d'Auray.

CHAPTER XX.

The dukes visit had an object: he came to announce to Fleurette his approaching departure for Havana. He had charged with the preparations for his voyage young Urbain Rémy, Fleurette's protégé, who had been appointed a mate on board the fine mail steamship, Christopher Colombus, belonging to the Saint Thomas line of steam packets.

Urbain had eagerly seized upon this occasion for proving his gratitude, all the more that the 5th of the month, the day fixed for the sailing of the vessel, was the day on which he himself was to commence his service, and he was delighted at making his first voyage under the eyes of his protector. Urbain had already made one trip to Havre, and was going to make another on the next day, in order to see that everything on board was ready before the duke's arrival. He had chosen the finest cabin and the best aired one, and had had it arranged in the most comfortable manner.

"Ah!" said Michellete, "that is doubtless the reason why he did not come yesterday to purchase any violets."

"Does he like violets?" asked Fleurette.

"Yes, indeed: he comes every day to get a bouquet of them for his mother. By the way, he is generally a long time selecting them."

"Does he haggle over them?" inquired the duke.

"Not exactly that," answered Michelette, "but he is a long time making up his mind; it frequently takes him a quarter of an hour."

"It strikes me," said the duke, shaking his head, "that Urbain Rêmy must be in love with you, Michelette, or with Fleurette."

"You believe so, monsieur le duc?" responded Fleurette absent-mindedly; "it is possible, I have paid no attention to it—Michelette," she added, as if she was giving an order concerning the shop, "you must look into this."

"Yes mademoiselle."

The duke re-entered his carriage, Michelette went out on foot to attend to some affair concerning the shop, and, a quarter of an hour later, Clotilde, who had promptly expedited her business with M. Newton, returned and found Fleurette seated at her counter, her head resting in her hands, pale and plunged in such profound reflections that she had not heard her god-mother enter. The latter divined the truth, and, silently approaching the flower-girl, took her hand and said:

"You have such an unhappy air, my poor Fleurette, that your news must be very sad."

"My god-mother!" exclaimed the other, as if she was waking from a bad dream. She attempted to smile and to joke about the unexpected meeting with the duke, but Clotilde was not to be deceived.

"Tell me the truth," said she earnestly; "I was expecting this, I was sure of it—he has found me frightful?"

"No, no," replied Fleurette quickly. "It happens that the first sight has simply not been favorable; but at the second all will be different."

Clotilde remained silent a moment, and then courageously taking her resolution. she said coldly:

"No, I will not attempt a second trial. What right have I to go begging for a love he no longer owes me, and to awaken, in making myself known, regrets which my silence will save him? After what you have told me of his cousin at Havana, who possesses all the qualities which make a union desirable, it would be too selfish to prevent his happiness because mine is henceforth impossible. I shall remain dead to him, who no longer needs me, and live for the only being to whom I am necessary, my poor brother, who awaits me and calls me. I will start as soon as possible," said she in a firm tone, "for New Orleans."

Fleurette endeavored in vain to make her change her resolution; in vain she insisted that Clotilde should see the duke d'Olona just once more; Fleurette was convinced, it was her firm conviction, that if the duke could spend one day, one evening, even a single hour in Clotilde's company he would find her so charming that he would very soon pardon her ugliness, or rather that he would no longer per-

ceive it. But all her prayers were useless. Clotilde declared energetically that she did not wish to see the duke again; that she wished to quit France; and that she was going, commencing from that very day, to occupy herself with the preparations for her departure.

"Do not disturb yourself about that, god-mother," said Fleurette sadly, "I will take charge of it."

"Ah!" said Fleurette to herself the next morning while descending to her shop, "was there ever such a fatality! I had but one object, one desire; that of bringing them together; and, as if purposely, at the very moment when I hope to re-unite them one starts for Havana and the other for New Orleans."

While thus dreaming she raised her eyes and perceived near the counter Urbain Rémy, the young sailor, who was apparently buying violets of Michelette. He was in truth holding in his hand a basket of flowers upside down, and the flowers were falling out of it, while he was watching Fleurette descend the stairs.

Urbain Rémy was remarkably handsome. Youth in its flower shone on his face. His eyes, ordinarily full of ardor and intelligence, now only expressed a mute admiration, which had absorbed all his senses and rendered him motionless. He was simply a statue, a superb statue, to which a glance from Fleurette soon gave soul and life. He then became conscious of the basket he had overturned while gazing at the young girl, and of the flowers which strewed the floor of the shop. He hastened to pick them up, and while he was thus engaged Fleurette coolly regarded him and, shaking her head, said to herself:

"Decidedly, it is not Michelette whom he loves."

All at once an idea crossed her mind, and she went up to him radiant with smiles:

"You, monsieur Urbain? What a pleasure!"

Urbain could not believe his ears or his eyes, yet he certainly heard the words, and the expression of pleasure which shone in the flower-girl's eyes could not be mistaken.

"Yes, mademoiselle," he responded, with a confused air, "I arrived from Havre yesterday, and return there to-morrow, and as I have a day to myself I have profited by it."

"In what way?" asked Fleurette.

"By coming to buy some violets for my mother."

"That is very good of you," said Fleurette. "But *I* have a favor to ask of you, monsieur."

"Speak, speak!" cried the young man, almost jumping for joy, "I am at your service. Where shall I go? What must I do?"

Fleurette motioned to him to sit down and to Michelette to go out.

Urbain would not have changed situations with a captain of a ship. He was alone with Fleurette, and *she* had invited him to take a seat beside her.

"Monsieur Urbain," said she, "I am very ignorant and you—are very wise. Are you acquainted with Havana?"

"Yes, mademoiselle; it is the capital of Cuba, one of the great Antilles; a very fine port, situated at the Gulf of Mexico."

"Thank you," said Fleurette, interrupting him, "and New Orleans; where is it situated?"

"Much further on."

"Then it is on the same side of the ocean?" cried she quickly, "on the same route?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Fleurette leaned towards him with such a warmth of gratitude that for a moment Urbain believed she was about to embrace him. However, she abstained, and contented herself with taking his hand,

"You are sure of this, monsieur?"

"Very sure."

"Explain to me how this voyage is made, and the course to pursue."

"One first goes from Paris to Havre; there one takes the steamship Christopher Columbus, of which I am one of the mates. One then touches at Southampton, where we have a regular trade with England, which furnishes us many passengers. Then we go in a straight line and in one breath to Saint Thomas; there our company's vessels stop, they go no further."

"Well? Then what is to be done?"

"At Saint Thomas is the main line, or rather there are three; one for Demerara, British Guiana; the second for

Aspinwall, isthmus of Panama; and the third for New Orleans, by way of Havana."

"That is the one I want—that is my line!" cried Fleurette, "I don't care to know about the others. And then?"

"Then, the passengers, leaving our vessel, take another steamer which conducts them, according to their destination, some to Havana, and the rest to New Orleans; which is situated near the mouth of the Mississippi River, in the state of Lousiana, United States of America."

"Very good, very good!" said Fleurette, arresting him in his geographical excursion, "now tell me how long this voyage lasts."

Urbain, with mathematical exactitude and as if reading from a book, recited all in one breath:

"From Havre to Southampton, twelve hours; Southampton to Saint Thomas, fifteen days; Saint Thomas to Havana, three days; Havana to New Orleans, five days; always excepting bad weather, accidents, shipwrecks, or lack of coal!"

"Nineteen days to be together!" calculated Fleurette to herself, "without counting delays; that is more time than I need. Now, monsieur Urbain," she went on aloud, "here is the service I expect from you and your gratitude."

Urbain was all ears; his heart beat violently: now he would not have changed places with a rear-admiral.

"Do you think," continued Fleurette, "that the vessel in which the duke d'Olona sails is a good ship?"

"Excellent!"

"Well! I beg of you to retain in it a nice stateroom for mademoiselle Jeanne d'Auray and her maid: she is returning to her brother at New Orleans, he is the head of the house of Jean d'Auray and Company, merchants."

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Don't forget that at any price I must have two places, and I will add that you must not speak to anyone of the commission I have charged you with. It is an affair," said she with a gracious smile, and again giving him her hand, "in regard to which I wish to treat only with you."

Urbain would not now have changed with an admiral. He promised that he would go to Havre next day, and would return in two days with the engaged places.

"No matter what the price is," repeated Fleurette.

"Yes, mademoiselle; rest easy."

Fleurette contented herself with telling her god-mother that her place and her waiting-maid's, she intended taking one with her, would be retained on board of an excellent vessel, sailing on the 15th from Havre to Saint Thomas, and from there to New Orleans. There was no question in regard to passports and the necessary letters of recommendation, with the care of which M. Newton, the American banker, charged himself. On the third day Urbain returned triumphant.

"Well, my two places?" anxiously inquired Fleurette.

"Here they are, but not without difficulty—and a great deal better ones than I hoped for. An elegant stateroom, situated in the best part of the ship, and among charming companions, two English families composed of ladies, whereas on the other vessel they were a mixed set."

"How, the other?" cried Fleurette turning pale, "have you not retained places on board your ship, the Christopher Columbus?"

"Please listen to me. I addressed myself to my chiefs, to my captain, who replied to me: 'Impossible, we are encumbered with passengers; not a single place vacant for this trip: And as you had said to me: 'I must have two places at any price,' I hastened to retain them on the very next vessel sailing."

Fleurette uttered a cry of despair.

"I was unable to inform you of the situation or to ask your advice," continued Urbain, in a satisfied manner, and in one day more every place would have been taken. So I have provisionally retained two places, with permission to give them up if they do not suit: as there will be no lack of applicants for them."

"And this is the way you execute my orders!" said Fleurette, pale with anger.

Poor Urbain, who thought he had acted for the best, felt all his courage abandon him. He divined that he had made a mistake, what it was he did not yet understand, but he did know that it was one of those great faults which decide the reputations of captains and the destinies of empires.

"Mademoiselle," cried he, all in a tremble, "pardon me;

you said that two places were necessary at any price; I believed I had done right."

"You have done all wrong; you easily enough found a place on the first ship sailing for M. le duc d'Olona, your protector."

"But since then," cried Urbain in despair, how many others have taken passage! Just look at the list they have sent me,"

Fleurette almost tore it from his hands. In truth every place, good or bad, was retained and paid for in advance by Americans, English and French. Many merchants and manufacturer's wives had retained the best cabins, after the duke d'Olona had engaged his. Fleurette studied the list attentively. The only names she recognized on it, besides the duke's, were those of Mrs. Nicholson and her husband, the latter a rich merchant from the United States.

Mrs. Nicholson, a rich and pretty American, as lovely and coquettish as a Frenchwoman, had spent six months in Paris with her husband, he engaged in business, and she in the pursuit of pleasure.

One could swear that at least one of the two had succeeded in attaining her purpose. This lady was one of Fleurette's customers and it was undoubtedly she who was quitting Paris to return to America, for she was to give a farewell ball in a few days at her hotel in the *rue Neuve-des-Mathurins*, for which Fleurette was to furnish the flowers and plants.

Without having determined upon any regular plan Fleurette comprehended that here was her only chance. What did she wish? she did not know, herself, but she was a girl to profit by every occasion, and even to create them when necessary.

She left poor Urbain all abashed and *tete à tete* with Michelette, whom she had recalled. She then took a shawl and hat, threw herself into a public coupé, and was driven to Mrs. Nicholson's. She pretended to have come to consult with the latter in regard to the decorations for the ball.

CHAPTER XXI.

FLEURETTE announced herself at Mrs. Nicholson's. She found the mistress of the house in the gallery where the dancing was to take place and very busy at the moment. She was disputing with her husband, a large, sandy colored American, with a short and square figure; as slow, grave and serious as his wife was active, volatile and impetuous.

"Yes, sir," she was saying, "this departure will make me die of chagrin."

"You will not die," gravely said the husband, "and we will depart on the 15th.; our places are engaged and paid for."

"And the court ball which takes place on that day, sir, the ball, the spectacle and the Fontainbleau *fetes* at which you swore to let me be present!"

"Yes, if you were invited, but you were not."

"I may be yet."

"The invitations are sent a month in advance, and everyone, French or foreigner, who is to get one has already received it, and we have received none."

"Because you do not know how to ask for anything, or rather because you have taken pains not to ask—I am sure of it, I have proof of it!"

The husband shrugged his shoulders without answering.

"I shall revenge myself, sir, I shall revenge myself! Ah!" said she as, turning round, she perceived Fleurette who had entered the gallery and had for some minutes listened at a distance but without losing a word. "Ah! it is you, mademoiselle Fleurette. I would have been very glad to give you my ideas and to receive yours in return in regard to distributing the flowers in this gallery, on the stairway, and in the other departments, but my nerves are in a frightful state this morning.

Her husband approached her with a shade of uneasiness in his manner and wished to take her hand, which she

quickly drew back, and, forgetting Fleurette's presence, she cried out:

"Yes, sir, as I have told you; you can carry me away, but not alive. To come to Paris to see what is beautiful and elegant and to leave without having seen a court *fete* is absurd, odious and tyrannical."

The scene commencing thus and continued in the same strain, in a few moments reached the denouement which might have been foreseen; a nervous attack. Mrs. Nicholson was about to fall on a sofa when Fleurette caught her in her arms. Mr. Nicholson, much frightened, had hastened as fast as his short legs would let him to the other end of the gallery to call for assistance; for it seemed to him a terrible crisis. While he was gone Fleurette put her lips to the pretty ear of the poor invalid, and whispered to her:

"Re-assure yourself, madame; you shall have an invitation."

Mrs. Nicholson instantly arose, and regarded Fleurette with an air of uncertainty, admiration and gratitude.

"You shall be invited to the ball, I promise you. As to going there that is your affair."

"I will go!" cried Mrs. Nicholson, squeezing the other's hands with all the energy of a woman who returns to life.

Just then Mr. Nicholson, arrived at the other end of the gallery, followed by two or three waiting-women, whose assistance was now unnecessary.

"Madame is not in a condition to speak of business just now," said Fleurette, with a caressing air, "I will return day after to-morrow, and I hope I shall find her better."

She quickly descended the stairs, threw herself once more into her coupé, and had herself driven to the d'Olona mansion. It was time, for half past six had struck, and the duke was about going out.

"You, my Fleurette!" cried he joyfully; "you visit me! Ah! how pretty you are," said he while trying to take her shawl and hat, while she positively declined letting him do.

"And you, monsieur le duc, how fine you are!" cried she, contemplating the ribbons and diamond stars with which his breast was covered.

"Yes: I am going to dine at court."

"Ah! the very thing; that just suits me. I have a favor to ask of you."

"Granted in advance, on condition that you embrace me."

"Afterwards," said Fleurette.

"Before!" said the duke.

"Bah!" gaily replied the young girl, "one does not bargain with friends. Before and after! and to commence—". She held up her fresh and rosy cheek to Fernand, and he ardently applied one of the best kisses that friendship ever gave.

"Now, speak!"

"Monsieur le duc, I want an invitation for the 15th. of this month to a *fete* which is to be given at the palace of Fontainbleau."

"For yourself, Fleurette?" asked he uneasily.

"No; for Nicholson and his wife, M. Nicholson is a rich citizen of the United States who came to admire the splendors of France, and does not wish to leave without having seen the *fetes* and the ladies of the court; his wife must be able to relate in America the marvels of Fontainbleau."

"You have never before spoken to me of the Nicholsons."

"That is true."

"You scarcly know them."

"True again."

"But all the world is not invited to court; it is a rare favor."

"Which would not be refused to monsieur le duc d'Olona. You will speak to the first chamberlain—the grand chamberlain, to the grand equerry, in short, to everyone. Finally," cried she with the anger of a child, and as if reserving this argument to the last, "I wish it, *I wish it*!—or we shall quarrel forever!" And she ran away.

Two days later she returned to Mrs. Nicholson, who was still disputing with her husband.

"Has this lasted since day before yesterday?" ingenurously asked Fleurette.

"Oh! no, it has just now been resumed cried Mrs. Nicholson, radiant and squeezing Fleurette's hand. "I have my invitation, and here it is. And do you believe that

monsieur Nicholson, whose promise I have, now hesitates, under the pretext that the ball will take place on the 15th."

"The day we are to sail" cried the husband.

"Well! we shall not go," said the wife.

"But our places! engaged on board the Christopher Columbus!—"

"Will be lost," gaily answered Mrs. Nicholson, "it can be charged to ball expenses, to general expenses."

"Lost!" repeated the merchant with secret wrath, "lost!"

"They shall not be lost," said Fleurette joyfully. "I will take them for a lady of my acquaintance. Give them to me."

"Is it possible!" cried Mr. Nicholson, "you, mademoiselle Fleurette?"

"Give them to me, then!" she said impatiently.

"But," said the merchant, still retaining the receipt in his own hands, "they say at Havre that all the places are taken some time ahead, and when can we now leave?"

"By the following steamer; here are places on it, which I will give you in exchange for yours."

"Ah! what a service!" cried Mr. Nicholson, who in his gratitude would have just then bought out Fleurette's entire shop. Then, looking at Clotilde's ticket, which Fleurette had handed him, he added shaking his head: "The steamer does not leave till the 1st of next month, it is a very long time!"

"It is too short!" said his wife with a sigh.

Fleurette's hopes were fulfilled. She had in her possession the two tickets which were of such immense value to her, they were her last remaining hope for the execution of of her generous project.

The last days before a departure quickly pass away. The duke left Paris on the 12th. He was, to his great regret, obliged to pass over to England on business affairs of M. de Castle-Mayor, his uncle, who had confided them to him. He would not, therefore, embark at Havre, but at South ampton, where the steamer was to stop on the second day

"In three months," said he to Fleurette, embracing her "I will return."

"With your wife," said she, weeping.

"No, I will keep my word, I will engage myself to no one."

"Without my advice?" cried she hastily.

"I swear it!"

"And I count upon your oath."

For a long time she followed him with her eyes, sorrowing over the three days that this sudden departure deprived her of; but content, on the other hand, at being able to accompany her god-mother to Havre without his seeing her.

All that could be foreseen by the most intelligent and tenderest devotion had been done by her in order that her god-mother might make the voyage under the best and most comfortable conditions. She had looked after the arrangement of all the trunks, the purchasing and packing of bonnets, dresses and toilet articles. She was like a mother occupying herself with a daughter. She had found, as a waiting-maid and companion for Clotilde, a women of forty-five years, of good family and well educated; reduced by poverty, she was only too glad to find an honorable living with mademoiselle d'Auray. In addition, Fleurette had recommended M. Urbain to take the greatest care of mademoiselle Jeanne during the whole time she might be on board the Christopher Columbus, to place himself at her orders, to serve her, to defend her, and, she added with energy, "to let himself be killed for her if it was necessary."

"I will act as if it were you, mademoiselle," the young sailor had replied, with such an accent of truth and such a desire of keeping his word, that Fleurette, who was laughing, stopped herself, much moved, and said:

"Don't get yourself killed, nevertheless, and return," she added, smiling, "if it is only to purchase my violets."

Arrived at Havre, and ready to embark and about to leave, perhaps forever, her native land and Fleurette, her sister and friend, Clotilde felt the stoical firmness in which until now she had encased herself commence to give way; her courage forsook her; she burst into tears; and threw herself into the arms of Fleurette, who was as moved as herself, but who was also sustained by hope.

"Courage, my dear, good god-mother," said she, "courage! We will see each other again soon."

"Never!" replied Clotilde, sobbing.

"You will return to France with your brother; if not, I will sell all I possess and go and find you."

"I forbid you to."

"Forbid me, also, to hear you!" cried Fleurette embracing her.

But the honr for sailing had arrived, the crew were at their posts, and the passengers were called on board.

Fleurette tore her self from Clotilde's arms, and ran along the dock in order to able to see her still a little longer.

From there she waved her handkerchief and Clotilde, at the stern of the vessel, responded in the same manner as long as she could distinguish her disconsolate god-child. But that was soon impossible: she saw, in the distance, the tower of Francis, the First, little by little become gray, grow smaller, and finally disappear, The vessel had reached the open sea,

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

Clotilde retired to her stateroom where she remained for some hours entirely absorbed in her grief and indifferent to what was going on around her, she scarcely heard the cries of the sailors, the noise of the machinery, or the regular and monotonous roaring of the rapidly revolving wheels which were carrying her far away.

Of the passengers on the "Christopher Columbus" (there were only thirty in all) the first class ones ate at the Captain's table, and the rest at the second table. Meal time sounded and Urbain, the mate, discreetly rapped at Clotilde's door and informed her that M. Desrambures, the captain, his officers and the passengers were waiting dinner for her. So she went to the dining saloon and was welcomed by the captain in the most respectful manner.

Clotilde, although her remarkable beauty was gone, was always sure of attracting attention by her elegant and distinguished manners. The captain begged her to take the seat at his right; and he conversed with her during the entire dinner, at first on subjects relative to the voyage they were commencing, but after a while the circle of conversation became enlarged. Clotilde, pleased to converse with a well instructed and agreeable man and thus forget, for a time, her sad thoughts, gave herself up to the present with pleasure. The captain, surprised at the extent of her knowledge and enchanted with her conversation, at once serious and gracious, was still more charmed with her simplicity and modesty. Far from parading what she knew she seemed, like a woman, to excuse herself and ask pardon for it.

After dinner they passed into the captain's *salon*. Some of the ladies, wives of merchants or manufacturers who

were travelling to the United States, seated themselves on the sofas placed in all parts of the *salon*. Conversation became general, which means that it was frivolous and tiresome. One of the ladies on looking around suddenly cried out:

"Ah! a piano!"

"Yes," said the captain, "a very fine Pleyel piano. Will you try it, ladies, and tell me if it is in tune, for I fear that that is the one thing it lacks. I forgot to assure myself of it before our departure."

As none of the others seemed inclined to try it Clotilde opened the piano, and running her fingers over the keys, drew forth some of the most brilliant and some of the falsest chords it was possible to imagine. The listeners, crying out, covered their ears, while Clotilde affirmed that the piano was an excellent one.

"But impossible to play upon," said the captain sadly.

"What a nuisance!" murmured a little blonde, the wife of a cotton merchant. "Mademoiselle might have assisted us to a dance or a waltz this evening."

"Yes," cried the other ladies, "it is such a great distraction in a passage of fifteen or sixteen days."

"If that is all, ladies!" answered Clotilde, smiling, "I see a piano key there, and in an hour from now I will have tuned the piano."

A unanimous cry of surprise, admiration and thanks arose in the *salon*.

"On condition that you leave me alone while I am doing it," it continued Clotilde, "for there is nothing in the world so wearisome as hearing a piano tuned."

They hastened to accede to her request. The captain had the affairs of the ship to occupy himself with, and as for the passengers, if the truth must be told, they had already commenced to feel the first terrible symptoms of sea-sickness, and each hastened to his own stateroom.

Clotilde, a daughter of Brittany, brought up on the shore of the ocean and accustomed from infancy to taking long trips on the sea in launches and even in smaller boats, the rolling of which was much greater than that of this heavy steam-ship, Clotilde found herself almost the only one left. She tranquilly finished her wearisome and monotonous

task and, the piano tuned, she retired to her stateroom, which, through the care of Urbain, or rather by Fleurette's orders, had been arranged like a fashionable lady's boudoir. She had been asleep for some time when the vessel stopped. Clotilde, awakened suddenly, asked madame Brevanne, her maid who slept near her, what was the matter.

"Don't disturb yourself, mademoiselle; M. Urbain, the young officer, warned me that at about midnight we would stop a short while at Southampton to take some passengers aboard, and said that after that we would not stop again until we reached Saint Thomas."

In fact many passengers, among whom was one of our acquaintance, were at that moment coming on board. Urbain, hat in hand, stood at the gangway in order to receive M. le duc d'Olona and conduct him to his stateroom.

Early the next morning the duke, who was one of the principal owners of the steam-ship company, was promenading the deck with Captain Desrambures conversing with him of the company's affairs, which, owing to the quantity of freight and number of passengers they were in the habit of carrying, were just then very prosperous.

A propos of passengers the duke questioned him in regard to those now on board, and the captain, still charmed with his remembrances of the previous evening, spoke of a young lady who was not pretty but who was the most amiable person he had ever met.

"Who is she?" asked the duke with curiosity.

"Look, monsieur le duc, there she is coming out of her stateroom with her maid."

The duke raised his eyes and instantly recognized Jeanne d'Auray: he had only seen her once, it is true, in Fleurette's shop, but her figure, her bearing, and her features were too remarkable to be easily forgotten. As to Clotilde, she so little expected such an encounter that in her trouble and surprise all her presence of mind deserted her, a circumstance which Fleurette had not foreseen. The blood rushed to her head, then back to her heart; she could no longer see anything distinctly, everything turned around, her knees trembled and she fell unconscious into madame Brevanne's arms. The duke and the captain ran to her aid. The former placed to her nose a vinaigrette, which Fleurette had

given him at their last meeting, as a souvenir of her, little thinking that her god-mother would be the first person to use it.

Little by little Clotilde recovered consciousness, and the captain smilingly said to her:

"Yesterday, madame, you were too rash; you pretended that sea-sickness would not know how to overtake you. You see, it has taken its revenge."

Clotilde, now entirely recovered, had regained her *sang-froid*. Addressing to the duke and the captain a grateful and gracious smile, she thanked them for their kindness and asked to be allowed to promenade alone in the air for a while, saying that was all she needed to completely restore her. So she walked away, not without agitation, and repeating to herself:

"What a rencounter! What an unheard of chance! When I write this to Fleurette she will scarcely be able to believe it; and I, myself, I wonder if I am really awake—yes, it is indeed he!—near me, with me—far from the world, and in the middle of the ocean!"

And she all at once began to reflect that a meeting so miraculous could not be solely the result of chance, but must have been designed by Providence.

"Yes," said she, doubly exalted by religion and love, "if God has, as by a miracle, thus brought us together it is because He does not wish us separated, it is because He has blessed us as *fiances*, and because He wishes that some day our destinies shall be forever united."

She then began to silently pray and thank God; and, fortified by prayer, she stood up full of joy and courage.

During the morning the duke cast a rapid glance over the ladies forming the society of the Christopher Columbus, a society which little suited his aristocratic tastes; and as the captain, confirming Fleurette's eulogies, had continued his praises of mademoiselle Jeanne d'Auray, sister of the rich merchant of the same name, the duke approached her as soon as he saw her re-appear. He inquired of her with interest concerning the latest news from Paris, and thereupon there ensued one of those conversations usual to Parisian *salons*, conversations light, lively and superficial, in which one speaks of everything and finds, the conversation

over, one has said nothing. Clotilde, to the great astonishment of the listening captain, was as frivolous as Fernand, though all the while seeming to say by her bright smile: "I am capable of better than this." But she wished to be amiable, and forced herself to try and become so, and ended by really being so. The duke found her conversation gay, spirituel and, above all, unpretentious.

"Parbleu!" said he to himself, "I am fortunate to find on board of this vessel, and when the passage is to last twenty days, some one with whom I can converse. I acknowledge that the young lady is perhaps a trifle superficial and slightly trivial, but she is amusing, and we have employed an entire hour, which passed away very quickly, in talking nothings."

We already know that the duke's great misfortune, one which almost always accompanies large fortunes, was to become easily wearied. He had acknowledged it to Fleurette; he became frightfully so when he had no one to love or to pay court to. And he now found himself in that position.

After dinner he was in the captain's *salon*, Clotilde had gone to her stateroom to get some work she was engaged upon, and the duke did not know what had become of her. None of the ladies present pleased him, they none of them possessed any real beauty. There were a few fantastic countenances and some irregularly pretty faces which had neither the gaiety, spirit, nor expression of Fleurette's, and the evening commenced for the duke under the most sombre auspices. He perceived a chess-board on the captain's table.

"Do you play chess, captain?"

"No, I am just commencing to learn, because they pretend that it is an admirable pastime for one on board ship, and one which never fails you. I only know the moves, as yet."

The duke shuddered.

"But I have heard it said, monsieur le duc, that you are a fine player, and I can learn from seeing you play."

"That will be difficult," replied the duke, smiling and looking around, "for I do not see any one here to make up a game with."

Clotilde just then entered, her embroidery in her hand. She heard these last words, and responded graciously:

"If I can be of any service, monsieur le duc, I am here and ready to accept the dangerous honor."

"You, mademoiselle?" cried the duke and captain together, and both astonished.

"On condition," she replied, seating herself at the table, "that monsieur le duc will be generous and spare his adversary."

Piquet, chess and backgammon were the favorite games in the marquise de Kéroualle's household. The old Breton gentlemen of her neighborhood devoted themselves, in her *salon*, to the most earnest combats, of which Clotilde had been at first simply a witness. But, later on, and in order to be able to always find in her at need a partner to make up their games, her cousin, madame de Kéroualle, and her friends, the old amateurs, had taught her all these games, which were suitable neither to her tastes nor her age. It was thus that she had become a skilfull player, almost in spite of herself and in the interest of her cousin.

The duke, wishing to respond to the appeal made to his generosity, played *en gentilhomme*, that is to say with negligence and without paying careful attention to his game. So that, to the captain's great astonishment and still more to his own, he soon lost this first game. He overwhelmed his adversary with compliments and praises and demanded his revenge, which she graciously hastened to accord him. This time he attended to his game. The victory was dearly disputed, but he again lost. It is said that the best friends quarrel at chess, which can be easily understood. In a game where nothing is left to chance and everything depends on the skill of the player to lose must necessarily wound one's self-esteem. But in the first place, Fernand and Clotilde were not yet friends; and in the second, Fernand, although somewhat spoiled by the flatterers who always surround the fortunate, really possessed an excellent character, which, unluckily, had not sufficient opportunity to show itself.

He now exhibited neither spite nor anger but eagerly solicited, according to his own expression, the honor of a third defeat. Clotilde did not commit the imprudence of letting him win; the duke would have easily seen through it and the triumph would have been, for him, only one humiliation the more. She played conscientiously and de-

fended herself valiantly, but Fernand, increasing his carefulness, attention and cleverness of combinations, gained ground step by step and, finally, after a desperate resistance on the enemy's part, he uttered the cry of victory: "Mate!" He was happy and delighted, the joy of a child shone in his eyes. Of his own accord he praised the talent and glorious defence of his adversary, a defence which enhanced stil more the brilliancy of his triumph. The truth is that they were equally good players, which is the best condition for playing with interest, with pleasure, and for a long time.

Fernand seized upon every occasion for renewing the contest, occasions always eagerly accepted; and the duke, who at first saw in Clotilde only a partner for chess, soon found out that there was before him, on the other side of the chess-board, not only an able adversary, but an amiable woman and one of heart and spirit. They frequently stopped in the intervals of the game to converse, and often Fernand would forget the revenge asked for, in order to give himself entirely up to the conversation thus commenced.

On the third evening they were seated opposite each other in the captain's *salon*; a chess-board was between them, but they not playing. Fernand had been led, without wishing it, to a subject of conversation which greatly interested him; Clotilde de Kéroualle. Mademoiselle Jeanne d'Auray had intimately known her, and he recalled what Fleurette had related to him of her god-mother's great esteem for this young lady, and he felt that her eulogies were not at all exaggerated.

"She was my companion in childhood," smilingly said Jeanne d'Auray, upon being questioned by the duke; "we were brought up together in Brittany; and I have been told monsieur le duc, that you were to have married her."

"That is true," said the duke sadly.

"And," asked Jeanne hesitatingly, "you loved her very much?"

"Yes, I adored her beauty, which was wonderful. As to her character and sentiments I was ignorant of them, I did not even know whether she loved me or not; and, mademoiselle, in regard to that you, who were her friend, would probably know more than myself."

"Yes." said Jeanne, hesitating and involuntarily lowering her eyes, "she loved you very much."

"Are you certain of it."

"You may believe me," said she with emotion. Why should you doubt it?"

"While I was paying court to her as her intended," he replied, "I was hardly allowed to speak to her. I scarcely ever heard the sound of her voice; which, by the way, if I do not deceive myself yours somewhat resembles."

"Chances, or error," said Clotilde, trying to smile.

"Indeed," continued the duke, "do you not find a resemblance between your voice and hers?"

"None, whatever," said Clotilde coldly.

"Of course you ought to know it better than I," the duke went on, without attaching further importance to the subject; "but what I was going to ask you, her childhood's friend, you who judge with so much discernment and justice, was to tell me what you thought of my poor *fiancee*."

Clotilde felt an inexpressible embarrassment, which was all the greater that the duke seemed to await her answer with lively interest.

Happily at this moment one of the lady passengers approached them, and seeing that they were not playing chess she addressed Clotilde:

"As you are not playing I come in the name of all the ladies to claim from mademoiselle the fulfillment of her promise of day before yesterday. We are very curious to know whether the piano she tuned is in a condition for playing contre-dances and polkas."

"Willingly, ladies," said Clotilde, rising and going towards the piano, which just then Fernand would have gladly sent to the bottom of the sea, though an instant later he was distracted from his bad humor by Clotilde's brilliant playing and could not refrain from listening to her nor from joining in the applause of the entire assembly. We have said before that under Clotilde's fingers the piano became an entire orchestra: She played all the evening without interruption and without rest to the great satisfaction of the ladies and their cavaliers, who did not know which to admire most, her talent or her complaisance.

Fernand next day seized upon a moment when she saw alone on deck and approached her.

"Do you wish to play chess?" said she politely.

He cared very little about chess at that moment, and was very anxious to resume yesterday's conversation.

"Yesterday, mademoiselle," he said, "I asked you something, two things in fact, which I would very much like you to answer: first, your opinion of Clotilde de Kéroualle; and next, her opinion of me."

"Monsieur," she replied, "your questions are very embarrassing (he could in reality see that she was very much embarrassed), I was too intimately acquainted with Clotilde not to be on this question, a partial judge, and my opinion would not be the disinterested one you expect. As to what Clotilde thought of you, monsieur le duc, that was a secret."

"Which it is no longer necessary to conceal," quickly said the duke, "since alas! she is no more. So you can tell me all, nothing is easier."

"Not for me," said she, "I would not dare reveal to you, whom I scarcely know as yet, remembrances so cruel and so recent."

She exhibited, while speaking, so much feeling and emotion that the duke fearing having been indiscreet, did not insist.

"You are right," said he, "I must merit such a confidence and prove that I am worthy of it before expecting to receive it."

From that hour the duke redoubled his assiduities and attentions to Clotilde. There was no merit in this, for he was always finding fresh charms in her conversation, such as Fleurette, with all her gentleness, was unable to offer him. Clotilde frequently led the duke to serious subjects, where she knew he was capable of following her: subjects which furnish intelligent and educated minds with endless and inexhaustible sources of conversation, and which coming from her afforded him a particular interest.

Clotilde, from the day when the duke d'Olona had asked her hand of madame de Kéroualle, had wished not to appear a stranger to the new and illustrious family into which she was about to enter. So she had studied the history of the South American revolutions, the changes which had occured

among them, and the new republic erected upon the *debris* of the former immense Spanish possessions. She spoke with warmth to Fernand of wars for independence in which his father had played such a grand part; of the events which had brought him to power; and of the important acts which during his five years as president had signalized his government and left to his son such a glorious heritage. At hearing a stranger thus recall the remembrances of the paternal glory Fernand thrilled with a sentiment of joy and filial pride such as no one had ever before made him experience.

Clotilde did not say that the son of such a father ought not to pass his days in trivial occupations; but such noble language, which he was not accustomed to hear, was like a mute reproach for the past and an easy precept for the future. And it was a woman who thus spoke to him, a young woman, whose interesting conversation held him as if entranced and whose words still resounded in his ears and heart long after she had ceased speaking.

One evening in the captain's *salon* he was still dreaming of a conversation of the above description which he had had that morning with Clotilde when she came in and seated herself at the piano with her back turned towards Fernand, who had not seen or heard her enter. This time she did not play dance music, but after a martial prelude she commenced a *bravura* which at once made apparent the brilliancy and wonderful extent of her voice. All listened in silence; but when she had finished bravos resounded on every side along with cries of "*Encore, encore!*"

Clotilde, unlike most possessors of great talent, did not need to be begged. This time she sang an air of Auber's *la Brise*, from his Opera of *Haydee*, with the accompaniment, on the open sea, of nature's waves and winds: her success was immense, and of her own accord, without anyone having to ask her, she began to sing the romance of *Saule* in *Othello*. Fernand could not see her face but it seemed to him that there were tears in her voice. This voice, so beautiful, expressive and pure, plunged him into indescribable ecstasies. The obscurity which commenced to creep over the *salon* added still another charm to his dream. He seemed to see before him in the shadow an angel, and this angel appeared, as did also her song, to descend from

heaven. It was with pain that he saw the lights arrive, for they dissipated his illusions.

On the next and following days Clotilde was more than once asked to take her seat at the piano. She was complaisance itself and the evenings on board became charming. Everyone seemed to love mademoiselle d'Auray. The men because she was good, modest, without pretention, and never thrust her merits forward; the women because they were not afraid of her and her lack of beauty made them pardon all her talents. The frankness, even, or rather the kind of coquetry with which Clotilde herself was the first to allude to her ugliness gave each the desire of contradicting her.

"It is not so bad!" repeated some.

"It is the most agreeable and pleasing ugliness that I ever saw," said others.

"And I find it actually becoming," cried the rest.

The truth is that one becomes accustomed to everything, to ugliness as well as to beauty. The husband of the most beautiful woman in the world ends by no longer seeing that she is beautiful; and the young girl who is most deformed by nature, never appears so to the father, and mother and sister who see her every day.

As to Fernand, at the end of a dozen days the features which had at first so shocked him were now no longer remarked by him. He did not think her beautiful but he he would have been astonished at any one else for thinking her ugly. He saw her through the eyes of a friend, whose kindly sight diminished her defects and magnified her good qualities. All that he cared to know of her was that mentally she was charming, and physically her bearing was distinguished, her eyes magnificent, her smile expressive, her hand delicious, and the companion ladder had revealed to him, almost in spite of himself, that she possessed an admirable foot and ankle. As to loving her for love's sake he simply did not think of it, and such an idea never would have entered his head. But he experienced, by his own acknowledgement, a great charm in conversing with her and so frankly sought to enjoy it on all occasions that his assiduities never awakened in any one's mind any malevolent reflections.

The evening previous to arriving at Saint Thomas he was seated near her on deck, and was speaking to her of France, which he had left and of Havana, where he was expected.

"I understand the motive of your voyage," said she. "The United States do not conceal their ambitious views in regard to the remaining Spanish possessions; Walker and his fellow adventurers have already attempted to seize them and it is very natural that you, one of the richest proprietors of the island, should hasten to defend it at the moment of danger.—Your presence, name and example will call the inhabitants to arms and they will choose you for leader. That will be grand, and worthy of your father's son!"

While she was speaking thus Fernand lowered his eyes and remained outwardly silent, but he was saying to himself:

"Yes, that is what I ought to be doing, what there is perhaps time enough to do yet."

He then acknowledged, almost blushing as he did so, that he only came with the design of improving the cultivation of the immense domains he possessed in common with his paternal uncle, M. de Castle-Mayor, and, at the same time, to arrange a marriage, which was as yet only a project, with his cousin, Giuseppa, who, it was said, was remarkably beautiful.

"Ah!" said Clotilde trembling, "is she more beautiful than mademoiselle de Kéroualle was?"

"I do not know, I have never seen her."

There was silence between them for a moment. The duke was the first to break it.

"Since we are speaking of Clotilde," said he, "do you recall the conversation we had some fifteen days ago in which you promised to tell me, when you should know me better, what my intended thought of me? You remember that you promised?"

"I did."

"Well, speak! what did she reproach me with?"

"That," said Clotilde with emotion, "perhaps you attached too great a value to exterior qualities. When age had come, when time had worn away her beauty, she feared,

she who had sworn to love you always, to see your love disappear."

"She was wrong. I am not like that. I believe so at least, and I leave it to you; is your opinion the same as her's?"

"Oh! I?" said Clotilde, "that is very different I have reasons for defending you before and against all. I even have proofs which speak in your favor."

"What are they?"

"The attentions with which you have deigned to honor me show that you do not care so very much for beauty."

"Ah! I don't accept that as a proof," cried he quickly, "and I in my turn shall defend you against yourself. Whoever pleases is good looking, and you please everyone!"

"Gallantry compels you to speak thus," said she smiling.

"No," he continued with warmth," I say things as I see them, as I feel them."

"Then they are illusions, for which I am much obliged to you."

"Let us stop on that subject," replied he impatiently, "one does not discuss one's sensations; each has, thank heaven! his own kind of charm and his own special merit—Clotilde was beautiful when one looked at her, and you, Jeanne, are beautiful when one listens to you!"

The next morning the vessel entered the port of Saint Thomas under full steam.

CHAPTER II.

The passengers on the "Christopher Colombus" changed vessels at Saint Thomas. Some of them took the Panama line, others that for Demerara, while the rest, among them the duke and Clotilde, took the steamer for Havana and New Orleans. The name of the latter vessel was the "Cactus," a ship which went by both steam and sails. It was

to leave the next day and would reach Havana in three days. So that Clotilde and Fernand had just that much longer to be together.

Clotilde had taken leave of the captain of the "Christopher Columbus" who had been exceedingly kind to her. There was another of the officers of whom we have said little: the young mate, Urbain Rémy, who, during the whole voyage had never ceased to look after Clotilde's welfare. In obedience to Fleurette's directions he had never lost sight of her, and tried to anticipate whatever orders she might have to give. Simply at the name of Fleurette the duke had seen Urbain tremble and blush. He was frequently pensive and often turned his eyes towards France.

"Of whom are you thinking, monsieur Urbain?" the duke had one day smilingly asked him.

"Of my mother, monsieur le duc," he replied, blushing.

"Of her only?" gaily continued the duke.

Urbain's embarrassment greatly increased, and the poor fellow, without too well knowing what he said, was obliged to stammeringly acknowledge thht he thought a great deal of mademoiselle Fleurette and his mother—his mother and mademoiselle—in a friendly way, be it understood.

"Of course," gravely replied the duke; "but still if they were both on this vessel, and both in danger of drowning at the same moment, and you could only save one of them, you would be very much embarrassed."

"Not at all," quickly cried the young man.

"And what would you do?"

"I would save my mother, and drown with Fleurette."

"Ah!" cried the duke with emotion, "that is a word which has gained you my esteem and on occasion, monsieur Urbain, I will remember it, I promise you."

Urbain was delighted, and his joy was all the greater that he was to return to France the next day; in sixteen days more he might be back there. Clotilde confided to him the journal of her voyage which she had written for Fleurette. It spoke of little else than Fernand. Fernand handed Urbain *his* letters for Fleurette. They spoke only of mademoiselle Jeanne d'Auray.

The American vessel on which our two travellers now found themselves was neither so comfortable, so well con-

ducted, nor even so solidly constructed as the French steamer. The temerity and imprudence of Americans are well known; *who goes fast goes well* is their principle; and if, by chance, a ship founders *en route* it is simply a detail. Besides a three days passage is soon over, and therefore what is the use in taking a lot of precautions most of which are useless. The "Washington," a rival packet, had taken only three days to go from Saint Thomas to Cuba, and therefore the "Cactus" must by all means make the passage in two days and a half. So that the vessel went under a full head of steam, and the land had for some time been lost to view. They were in the open sea.

On the very first day some accident had happened to the machinery, one which could have very easily been repaired but it would have necessitated a stoppage and the Captain had sworn to enter Havana by noon of the next day. So they continued at full speed and when the night fell, the passengers tranquilly retired to their staterooms, without having the slightest suspicion of any danger. Early in the night the breeze freshened and little by little became a violent hurricane. The ship was greatly tried, and towards two o'clock in the morning the passengers were awakened by a terrible shaking. The greatest damage had happened to the machinery, and to repair it the engineers demanded five hours.

"No, no," cried the captain, "we will give up steam and go under sail."

They obeyed and unfurled the sails, at the risk of being foundered by the tempest, which was then raging in all its fury. The usual tranquility of the West Indian Sea is occasionally disturbed by terrible hurricanes; the present one was frightful and the wind directly against them. It was therefore necessary to make many tacks and try to advance by taking short stretches in the same direction as the wind. An hour later, towards three o'clock, the darkness was profound. They heard above the wind the noise of the sea breaking on reefs. This noise became more and more distinct and terrifying. Already, doubtless, they had been carried considerably out of their course, but the darkness prevented them making any observations or knowing the exact position of the ship.

By day break ll on the ship saw the extent of their peril. The vessel had entered a bay closed in by breakers whose menacing points were plainly visible. These rocks were terrible and their own loss was almost inevitable, nothing could save the packet; for they could no longer use steam, nor escape the danger towards which the wind and tide were impelling them. They then resolved to repair the machinery as well as they could. It was now their only hope of manœuvring against the wind and current, their only hope of safety. Gold, wine and promises were lavished upon the sailors, who went to work with ardor; but it would require more than five hours to make the necessary repairs and it was easy to calculate that in two hours at the latest the ship would be on the rocks or would break to pieces and sink. At first the danger had only been understood by the Captain and his first officer. Then the sailors commenced to have premonitions, and one of them cried out that all human effort was henceforth useless and therefore he refused to obey any longer. The Captain, who commanded his vessel in true American style, revolver in hand, made no other reply than to coolly blow out the sailor's brains, and then he forced another to take his place. Order was restored and a quarter of an hour later discipline was maintained as usual but the terror had spread among the passengers. Among the women especially there were cries, tears and despair; and Clotilde alone remained mistress of herself and tried to calm the others and re-assure madame Brevanne, who had lost her head.

"Your tears and cries," said Clotilde coolly, "will not save you, and they will prevent our being saved, for they disturb the sailors and impede the working of the ship. Do no weep, but pray. Pray to God who alone is able to protect us."

As she finished these words the duke appeared on deck. Silence had succeeded the sobbing, the women all knelt in prayer, and Clotilde, calm and resigned, her eyes directed towards heaven, implored God not so much for herself as for him whom she loved. The duke saw her, and at that moment thought her beautiful. At a glance she had measured their danger, and was the only one who looked it fearlessly in the face. The few days she had passed in the

duke's company had increased her love, but had destroyed her hopes; she understood that she might aspire to his friendship, but never to his love. This love was a vanished dream, a past happiness, which she could no longer hope to receive. Fernand, seduced by his cousin's beauty, would forget madamoiselle Jeanne d'Auray quicker yet than he had forgotten Clotilde de Kéroualle. So that upon seeing death so near she was resigned; her resolution was taken; she would silently await the final moment and then she intended to throw herself into Fernand's arms, and say to him: "I am Clotilde your *fiancee!*" and thus die with him.

At the first alarm of danger the duke had run to the Captain offering his services and putting himself at the other's orders. The Captain had energetically grasped his hand, as a sign of thanks, and had coolly replied: "useless!" In a few words he had explained that their safety depended entirely on repairing an iron wheel; a special work for which unfortunately the duke was unfit. Fernand thought only of Jeanne. He hastened to give her his care and assistance, for he expected to find her half dead from fright, but, in place of that, he found her, calm and tranquil, reanimating her companions' courage. While he was wondering at her *sang-froid*; she replied to his thought:

"Resignation in danger is the duty of women, and our only courage is in knowing how to die. But we shall not die," said she in an assured tone, and coolly proceeded to reason upon their remaining chances of safety.

Meanwhile the tempest raged and the wind dragged the vessel on. And every time the lightning pierced the darkness they could see in the distance the reefs, on which a horrible, terrible death awaited them.

"God will save us," cried Clotilde. "He who has let loose this terrible storm can stop it at his will!"

"And yet for fifteen hours," said the duke, smiling bitterly, "the wind has constantly pushed us towards this fatal place."

"One reason more," replied Clotilde, "that at any moment it may suddenly change its direction."

Every one received with rapidity the words which came from her lips and, without entirely believing them, blessed

the consoling angel who in the midst of such a tempest still gave them hope.

"Yes," said she with a conviction which she almost made them share, "in a short while the wind will suddenly change, by that time the workmen will have finished their task, the ship will be manageable, and we shall rapidly get out of danger."

"Do you believe it? do you believe it?" asked at the same time twenty already re-assured voices.

At that moment a passenger, pale and trembling appeared at the top of the stairs which led from the engine-room.

"They have mutinied!" he cried.

"Who?" demanded all, at once.

"The men. They refuse any longer to work as they say all is lost!"

A cry of terror ran along the deck.

"They have taken possession of the store-room, have broken open barrels of rum and brandy, and are getting drunk so as not to fear death when it arrives."

Clotilde now essayed in vain to re-animate the courage of her companions in misfortune, despair had taken possession of all. Cries and sobs resounded on all sides, the women threw themselves on their knees crying for help and wringing their hands. There was no priest on board. The company owning the vessel found that for a three days passage that would be a luxury easily dispensed with, and then too, a priest would have taken up the place of a paying passenger. So that this supreme and last consolation, religion, was refused to these unhappy people who were dying of terror and saw themselves lost both in this world and the next. One young mother, doubtless terrified by the orgies she had seen below, at that moment came on deck desperate, beside herself and holding clasped to her breast a child three or four years old. The mother could proceed no further, her knees gave way, she fainted and was about letting her child fall when Clotilde caught it in her arms. The child commenced to play with her ringlets and said gaily:

"They say down stairs that we are going to be drowned." Then he added smilingly: "What does drowned mean, madame?"

"It means," responded Clotilde, embracing him, "that God and the angels are waiting for you in Paradise. Sleep, my child, sleep! Your waking will be glorious." And she commenced a lullaby, while Fernand, leaning against the taffrail, silently admired her. The child quietly went to sleep; his breath was sweet, his cheeks fresh and rosy, and he had a smile on his lips. Clotilde handed him back to his mother, who had by this time recovered her senses, and was sobbing violently, and said to her:

"Keep still, and do not wake him up."

The mother stifled her sobs and silently embraced her child. But what scenes of desolation, discouragement and cowardice were around her! Even the men, almost as terrified as the women, were for the most part in such a state of prostration that they no longer had strength to stand up.

As to Fernand, the feeling he experienced was very different; it was a sort of dull anger, a concentrated rage, which had taken possession of him. This peril, against which he could do nothing, rendered him furious. If he had had bayonets before him, or an enemy's battery; if he had been obliged to yield his life while fighting for it, defending it, he would not have cared, he would have been happy at a death thus gloriously bought. But to die among weeping women, on the deck of a wrecked ship, to be swept away by a squall against which his energy was powerless, and his courage useless, to find death at the bottom of the sea, exasperated him.

Clotilde, whose glances had not left him for an instant, probably divined what was passing in his soul, for she approached him and said in a sweet voice:

"I can conceive that this is a cruel moment for you, who have had all that embellishes life, and that makes it desirable. To see death thus arrive without turning pale requires courage, Fernand, and of all I see around me you are the bravest."

"After you, Jeanne." And regarding her with respect, he continued: "You find words of consolation for all; you are only uneasy for others, and it seems that for you there is no such thing as danger."

"Oh, I!" said she, "my life has been so sad that I do

not think of either regretting or defending it. One does not lie at a moment like this, and God is a witness that if He would accept my life in place of yours I would be ready to instantly offer it to Him."

There was such an accent of truth in her voice that Fernand, forgetting the tempest, the unbridled winds, and the furious waves which broke over the deck, seized her hand and cried:

"You would die for me, mademoiselle! And why?"

Clotilde was about to avow everything; but she first threw a glance around her; the reefs were too far off, the danger was not enough yet. She stopped herself, and coldly replied:

"Because my life can serve no one, while yours may be of use to others. Rich and generous, how many of the unfortunate you would be able to succor! Full of youth, ardor and noble sentiments, how many great things you could undertake!"

"Ah!" cried he in a rage, "I only aspire to one thing just now, to tear you from danger, to save you from the waves, to carry you safely to the shore, and then to die! This is what I ask of heaven; but heaven is deaf and unjust, it confounds the innocent with the guilty, and it lets you, who are virtue personified, perish without pity like me, who have always offended it, like me who brave and curse it!"

Clotilde was frightened at the sort of delirium in which she now saw him, but she did not lose courage. She was no longer the sweetheart only, she was also the pious and Christian woman whose duty it was to try and save all who were dear to her. Love and religion gave her a heretofore unknown and irresistible eloquence, and persuasion flowed from her lips; the blasphemer, no longer had strength to outrage God. At this angel's voice he felt his wrath melt away, his heart soften, and faith succeed impiety. It was as a Christian to her friend and brother that Clotilde spoke, and these words *friend* and *brother* had an inexpressible sweetness in her mouth. She showed him a merciful God who was waiting to pardon and receive them into His bosom.

"What throws you into this unreasoning and culpable

condition," said she, "is that you do not *believe;* but God, who strengthens, will also render you courageous by making my belief enter your soul; He will give you hope in giving you faith. You just now spoke of dying to save me; I will try and save you while dying with you!"

Fernand gave a great cry and fell on his knees and Clotilde, her face radiant with a holy joy, resting one hand on Fernand's head and raising the other towards heaven, cried aloud in the tempest:

"You hear, my God, he returns to you! He prays! Let his voice join itself to mine and raise itself to You!" And then she went on fervently praying. At length holding out her hand and pointing to the furious waves which surrounded them, she calmly said to Fernand:

"You have heard your sister's voice; the friendship which unites us shall never again be broken, we shall never more be separated!"

Fernand answered by pressing her to his bosom. Clotilde asked for nothing more, and was now ready to die.

All at once terrible cries arose from below. They heard a crackling noise proceeding from the hold of the ship, and some bright gleams shone through the badly joined planks of the deck. The ship was on fire.

The men were completely intoxicated; not daring to look death in the face they had sought from rum and brandy the courage they lacked. Many of the sailors had wished to follow their example and one of them, already half drunk, had placed a lamp near an open barrel of rum which had quickly caught fire. In trying to extinguish it he had upset the barrel and the burning liquid had run over the planks of the deck which was soon in flames. Thus the unfortunate ship, already at the mercy of the waves, was soon a prey also to fire. The tempest and conflagration seemed to have united together for its destruction.

On hearing the cry "Fire! fire!" Fernand tore himself from Clotilde's arms. In the presence of this new disaster his energy was re-awakened. At last a danger presented itself that he could combat, an enemy which activity and courage could vanquish. Addressing himself to the male passengers on deck, who, were passively awaiting death, he shook them violently, and shouted in their ears:

"Will you let these women and children burn without trying to save them?"

Many did not comprehend him or could not answer him. He forcibly continued:

"Will you do nothing to save *yourselves* from the frightful torture of the flames?

At these words some raised their heads, came out of their torpor and tried to rouse themselves, when a violent shock made them stagger and fall back on the deck. The ship, as if enveloped in a water-spout, had whirled around, taken a leap on the waves and stopped short. It was what is called at sea a sudden shifting of the wind. The latter had all at once changed and forced the vessel to take another direction from the one it had been pursuing, but not without causing great damage to the sails and masts and horrible disorder in the interior of the vessel. They thought it was going to sink as for an instant it had turned over on one side; but it suddenly righted, and before a strong but favorable wind it rapidly rushed in a direction exactly opposite to that which it had previously followed, carrying within it a fire which was constantly increasing in intensity. The cries of the men in the hold who were already being devoured by fire appalled the passengers, and the flames were soon seen bursting through the hatch-ways.

"Arise! arise!" cried Fernand to the passengers, "your safety is in your own hands!"

"Do you not see the reefs receding," cried Clotilde: "God has preserved us from drowning, do you save us from burning!"

"To the pumps!" cried the captain and officers to the sailors still remaining faithful to their duties.

Fernand hastened to their assistance followed by a party of passengers whom he had finally made understand the situation and who consented to assist to save themselves. He had divided them into two squads who relieved each other in turns at the pumps but he himself took neither rest nor relaxation. Thanks to the pumps, which were in good condition, they were successful in combatting the progress of the fire, but not in mastering it, and for a long time it resisted all their efforts. Finally they believed they had extinguished it. The workers were overwhelmed with

fatigue and gave themselves up to rest. Fernand and the captain had at length decided to take a few moments repose, which they both much needed, when the cries of "fire!" again resounded and started the crew up out of their sleep. The fire had reappeared in another part of the vessel, and for five hours more demanded constant surveillance. At the least spark, wet hammocks, blankets, and the sand used for ballast, were put in requisition to prevent and put out the fire, which was ever ready to burst forth.

"Aid yourself, and heaven will aid you," is an old saying, and heaven had evidently at last taken pity on those who had shown so much perseverance and courage, for Fernand was finally able to say to Clotilde."

"You were right, our guardian angel. Saved! saved!"

"Thanks to you," she replied, "and I shall never forget it."

It was night when the "Cactus" finally arrived at her destination. In place of making the passage from Saint Thomas to Havana in two and a half days the vessel had taken six.

A magnificent steam-ship, the "Orinoco," had steam up and was all ready to sail for New Orleans, and Clotilde and the other passengers who did not wish to continue their journeyon the unlucky "Cactus," on which they had already run so many risks, were transferred to the other vessel. In vain the duke, who hated to part with Clotilde, wished to detain her at Havana and present her to his relatives. For reasons easily understood she would not consent. Her brother, notified by her of her departure from Havre, had been for some days expecting her arrival at New Orleans and the delay of the "Cactus" must have already caused him serious alarm. This there was nothing to answer.

Fernand took Clotilde's hand, and in an affecting and solemn voice he said:

"After what has passed, Jeanne, we can no longer I hope, be strangers to each other. In the face of death you were a sister to me, and all my life I will be a brother to you and claim the title and rights of such. A brother does not forget his sister, he is her friend and writes to her; permit me to love you and to write to you."

In his words, which came from his heart, there was a

calmness, a loyalty and a frankness of expression which at once both pleased and pained Clotilde. She would perhaps have preferred a little hesitation and emotion. Musing, she kept silent; while Fernand tenderly pressed her hand, which he had kept in his own, and said to her, as a friend to a friend:

"Will you promise to answer my letter?"

"Yes," said she slowly.

Although overcome with fatigue Fernand personally attended to the transfer of Clotilde's effects to the "Orinoco," then accompanied her and her maid to the new vessel, and did not leave them till the last moment before the departure, which took place in the night.

CHAPTER III.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The duke d'Olona, could not at that hour go to his uncle's house, which was a large and superb mansion situated two leagues from the city. He asked one of the public servants at the dock which was the best hotel in the city.

"I will conduct you, my lord," the man had replied, "to the Antilles Hotel, where all the noblemen and princes stop."

"Go ahead," said the duke following him.

Most of the streets were plunged in darkness, but at last they arrived in a large square where the duke perceived a palace brilliantly illuminated. Domestics in livery stood in the square and in the courtyard of the palace. Violins, horns and castanets sent forth joyous sounds.

"What is all this?" demanded Fernand.

"A great ball, my lord, which the Captain-General gives, and to which are invited not only the nobility of the city but also those of the surrounding country; as your lordship may see from the immense crowd and the magnificence displayed. If your lordship will approach you will perhaps

be able to see some of the superb toilets through the windows."

Fernand had no desire to see ball dresses: he wished only for one thing, to find a bed where he could go to sleep. He soon arrived at the Antilles Hotel; and the host, although all his apartments, he said, were retained could offer him one, his handsomest; it was probably thus that he designated every room in his house. The "handsomest," was ugly enough, however, and small, and only separated from its neighbors by thin wooden partitions. But one night is soon passed, particularly when it is already more than half over, and Fernand hastened to take possession of his couch.

In spite of his want of rest he was so agitated that it was some time before he could get to sleep. He still heard the noise of furious waves, and saw the flames crawling along the interior of the ship. He saw plainer than everything else the figure of Jeanne towering over all amidst the tempest; Jeanne his sister, his good angel, this superior, incomparable woman, or rather whom he dared not compare with anyone; and either through her memory or that of the terrible events through which he had just passed it seemed to him that his thoughts had taken a grave and serious turn that up to then they had been unaccustomed to.

His eyes had finally closed, and for some moments he had enjoyed the sweets of a first sleep, a deep and restoring sleep, when he was suddenly awakened by joyous cries and shouts of laughter coming from the neighboring chamber. He could easily understand that these were uttered by young country girls, who, coming from the ball with their families and not being able to return to their homes at such a late hour, would not leave the city until morning. While undressing they conversed of the invitations they had received and the quadrilles and waltzes they had danced.

"Ah!" murmured the duke, "they have been dancing so much the better! they are probably tired and will want to go to sleep."

But they continued their conversation. In vain the duke buried his head in his pillow and covered his ears, their incessant chatter made sleep impossible for him. Indiscreet in spite of himself, he was obliged to overhear

them while he swore at them. It would have been an endurable situation if this conversation, while depriving him of his rest, had offered him any entertainment. But it was only about the toilets of all the young ladies at the ball, which they described critically and at length, and then about the gentlemen and their different styles of dancing. Fernand hoped, these two subjects finished, that the young girls would at last become still and let him sleep. Vain hope! The question of waltzing then came up, whether it should be *trois temps* or *deux temps*, and there ensued an ardent and animated discussion which appeared as if it would prolong itself indefinitely, until Fernand impatient and almost beside himself muttered between his teeth:

"What stupidity! What nonsense! What silly stuff! If these are specimens, of what use are the women here? What do they do at home?"

At last being unable to stand it any longer, and as if seized with an attack of fever, he jumped from his bed and, forgetting his habitual gallantry and gentlemanly manners, rapped rudely against the wooden partition and cried in the voice of a stentor:

"Silence, chatterboxes, and go to sleep!"

At this unexpected command the young girls uttered cries of surprise and fright. Mortified at this brusque apostrophe, and above all distressed at having been overheard, they kept still and finally went to sleep.

A long time had elapsed since Fernand had played this rude part. It was midday when he awoke and his fatigue had disappeared and his strength was completely restored. His young neighbors and their families had left the hotel. He enjoyed an excellent breakfast, dressed himself, ordered a carriage and had himself and his luggage conducted to his uncles.

The latter's mansion, as we have said, was situated about two leagues from the city. It was a large and old chateau built in the Spanish style and surrounded by an English park: immense plantations, and numerous buildings for employes, extended in every direction. A thousand slaves, divided into brigades, worked there under the orders of a large staff of officers and assistants.

The comte de Castle Mayor received his nephew with

great honor in the courtyard at the foot of the stairs of the main entrance. He then introduced him into the grand *salon* and presented him to Guiseppa, his cousin, who was surrounded by young companions who formed a sort of court around her. M. de Castle-Mayor had not exaggerated his daughter's beauty: she merited her name of "the Goddess of the Antilles," which the young gentlemen of the surrounding country had given her. Fernand did not conceal his admiration, but frankly expressed it to his uncle, who smilingly rubbed his hands, and whispered:

"Tell me what you think of her to-morrow for to-day is not one of her brilliant days: she hasn't her usual beautiful color, she is so fatigued, having spent last night at the ball."

"Indeed, my pretty cousin?" said Fernand with emotion.

"Oh! the ball would have been nothing, cousin, but we were not allowed to sleep afterwards, were we Isabella?" said Giuseppa addressing one of her companions.

"I should say not," answered the latter, "we had such a strang neighbor, such an original gentleman.—"

At the first words pronounced by Giuseppa the duke had shuddered M. de Castle-Mayor believed it was from pleasure. Fernand's emotion was however produced by a very different feeling. He still had some doubts which the voice of her companion, Signora Isabella, succeeded in removing. These two voices, let them be taken together or separately, were but too well known to him; they had caused him such a disagreeable and prolonged sensation the night before that the sound of them still lingered in his ears and made him nervous. Giuseppa then commenced relating, amid the applause of the company, their adventure of the preceding night, and mimicked the coarse voice of the supposed sailor, unused to society and badly brought up, who had imposed silence upon them and had called them "chatterboxes."

Fernand pretended to be still more indignant than herself at the proceeding, yet he laughed heartily at the anecdote, which he found charming.

"Is it not true?" said M. de Castel-Mayor to his nephew, pointing to his daughter, "what I told you in

Paris? She is gay; she is spirituelle; and then she has received such a complete and distinguished education! I have given her all kinds of masters, and she can converse on any subject. Try her."

Fernand conversed with his cousin part of the evening and at each answer looked around with sadness and regret. Among all these people something was wanting and he experienced a terrible void. Jeanne was no longer with him!

Despite the fatigues of yesterday Giuseppa and her friends wished to waltz to the music of the piano. Fernand asked his cousin to be his partner to the delight of his uncle.

"Do you waltz *a deux temps*, cousin?" asked Giuseppa.

"Certainly, my dear cousin," replied Fernand.

"How nice! You are right. Can you believe that Isabella, my best friend, professes a deplorable system, that of the *trois temps?*"

"It is absurd."

"Is it not? For in short, as little as one may think it—"

And she recommenced the discussion of last night, a second edition of which she gave her cousin. This time it mattered little to Fernand, who was as willing she should talk on that subject as on any other; he was not listening.

On the next and following days he wrote to Jeanne, and related in detail, first; his arrival at Havana; next; at his uncle's; and, later on, the life of the family in which he was living.

He made long excursions into the country, went over his large plantations (which he had hitherto only known from hearsay), and visited his numerous slaves, some of whom he owned in partnership with his uncle. He passed entire days among them studying ways of ameliorating their condition, and, above all, that of the women and children. As to fears of invasion by the Americans, concerning which he had conversed with Jeanne on board the "Christopher Columbus," the island was just then in a state of profound security; so there was nothing for him to do but to occupy himself with his duties of planter and colonist, which were not without interest.

More than once he had asked Giuseppa questions concerning the society and customs of Havana, or simply con

cerning her own occupations in the interior of her father's house and how she managed it. But he had always instantly seen languor and ennui depicted on her features, as, with the indolence of a creole, she repeated:

"I know nothing about it; I do not mix myself up in such things."

On the other hand she occupied herself very much with her toilet, and would question her cousin in regard to the fashions and materials of France; she would particularly inquire what were the latest styles of ladies mantles and bonnets in vogue in Paris. On this subject she could obtain little or no information from Fernand, and was constantly astonished at her cousin's ignorance. To tell the truth, each had little respect for the education or knowledge of the other.

At length, one day when Fernand, having heard crinoline discussed for more than half an hour, had quitted the *salon* in order to take a breath of fresh air, a letter was handed to him. It was postmarked New Orleans and was from Jeanne d'Auray.

She had made a good voyage and had been received with open arms by her brother, who already could not do without her. He was ill, and she was already established as his nurse. His house had formerly been given over to pillage, but she had now become major-domo and *intendante.* Order reigned and health and happiness commenced to reappear. She passed rapidly over these household affairs, in fact scarcely spoke of them, but she dwelt at length on other details she believed might interest Fernand; on the aspect which New Orleans and Louisiana presented to her, those regions which formerly belonged to France and where the decendants of old French families are still to be found; a French country in heart, language and memories, and which for Clotilde, was not a land of exile, but a fatherland regained at fifteen hundred leagues from France.

In this letter and those succeeding it. Clotilde constantly revealed new qualities to Fernand. In conversing with a friend, even the most intimate, a woman never confides more than half of soul; but in writing to him she discloses it entirely, and it was only now that Fernand knew the value of the treasures which up then he had only suspected.

What nobility in her sentiments! what purity in her ideas! what a charm in her wit! and, better still, what kindness in her heart! She was never occupied with herself, but always with her friends; what concerned her was nothing, what interested Fernand was alone of importance in her eyes. There was so much devotion about her for those whom she loved that it seemed as if a friendship so tender ought to supercede everything; and that nothing in the world could console one for its loss. Just now Fernand did not bother himself much in regard to exterior charms. On the contrary; since he was condemned, night and morning, to observe the beauty and listen to the conversation of his cousin and her young companions he had persuaded himself by an exaggeration sufficiently common to passionate people, that beauty and silliness were inseparable, and one day he wrote to Fleurette that henceforth he had taken a hatred for all pretty women, except herself.

For nearly three months each vessel departing for Louisiana carried a letter from him, and every packet from New Orleans brought him one. But to his last letter he had received no answer. Nothing had come for him. His uneasiness and disappointment made him comprehend, without acknowledging it to himself how dear Jeanne d'Auray was to him, and how difficult it already was for him to live away from her. He must wait five days before the arrival of another packet. The first three he endeavored to conceal his trouble and anxiety; but commencing from the fourth, this was impossible. Two or three times a day he would mount his horse and gallop to the harbor to see if there was not some vessel coming from the gulf of Mexico. He would return sad at heart, and it was in those moments more than any other that the toilets and polkas of his cousin appear intolerable to him.

Finally on the sixth day the letter so greatly desired arrived. It contained only a few lines, written in an apparently trembling hand; and to a very attentive eye, it would not have been impossible to discover traces of tears upon the following words:

"I have been ill, my friend; but do not be uneasy. Thanks to my brother's care it will amount to nothing.

"An idea which I am unable to banish has remained

fixed in my mind, one which frightens me and which I would like to withhold but which I ought, in spite of my inclinations, to make you acquainted with.

The Spain of the Cid has revolted, they say, and has uttered the war-cry. It has been said in my presence that there is glory to be gained in in Morocco.

I thought of you!

Your father, I am sure, would have done what I do It may be that I shall all my life deplore this fatal advice. I may die of it; but, as your friend, I should never pardon myself had I not given it to you."

Fernand uttered a cry and pressed the letter to his lips.

"Yes," he cried with an accent full of courage and pride, 'there spoke my friend, *my true friend.*"

That same evening he appeared in his uncle's *salon* in travelling dress and made his *adieux.* M. de Castel Mayor vainly tried to detain him.

"My cousin is charming," said Fernand, "but it has been easy for me to see that I am not pleasing to her; our tastes do not agree, and there are a great many young cavaliers here, pretty dancers, who will suit her better than I could hope to."

"At least remain among us," answered his uncle; "among your possessions, which thanks to yourself have in three months doubled in value; among your slaves, who are well and whom you have made love you. Remain, and teach me how to do the same."

"No, uncle, I am about to join the Spanish army in Morocco."

"For what good?"

"I will ask General Prim, whom I knew at Madrid, if he will take me under him as a volunteer."

"For what good?" impatiently repeated the uncle.

"To fight, I do not wish to remain a planter at Havana, when all the other young gentlemen of my age are soldiers in Africa."

"Who has said that to you?"

"A friend, who knows when to give good advice, and I shall follow his."

"A friend who probably hasn't a *maravedi!* But you, who have such a fine property, gold mines, and immense

revenues; exposing all this to be carried off by a cannon ball!"

"All the more merit in doing it. Adieu, Uncle." And he embraced M. de Castel Mayor and his charming daughter and then took his leave.

A few weeks later this elegant young man, the favorite of all the ladies, who until then had passed his life amid luxury, bravely commenced that long and rough campaign in which the enemy's yataghans and bullets were far less formidable than the cold, hunger, fatigue, sickness and privations of every description.

CHAPTER IV, AND LAST.

Let us return to Fleurette, whom we have not seen for some time but whose position when we left her had nothing disquieting about it. The departure of the duke d'Olona had increased and emboldened her adorers.

Ludovic Durussel had lost his mother, and during the first two months of his mourning he had not appeared at Fleurette's. He was making up for it now, however, for he came every day to get fresh flowers for his mansion to the great chargin of Urbain Rémy, a modest purchaser, who, faithful to his violets, also purchased a bouquet every day. He had obtained permission from his chiefs to spend all the time his services were not needed on board his vessel, at Paris with his mother.

Ludovic's presence frightened the others, Urbain to commence with, who continued to preserve an absolute silence. They knew of M. Durussel's marriage projects, and since his mother was dead nothing now prevented him from carrying them out. For the rest the gentle flower-girl, gracious with all was tender to none; her only *friends* were both far away from her.

Urbain, on his first voyage, had brought her the journals of Clotilde and the Duke. This commencement of their

acquaintance had given Fleurette great hopes, which were confirmed by other letters she had since received. The account of the tempest had at first frightened, then enchanted her; the sojourn at Havana and cousin Giuseppa had delighted her; but the departure for Morocco had grieved her. For the first time in her life she blamed her god-mother, and accused her of indifference and hardness: she trembled for poor Fernand, and when people came into her shop, night or morning, they always found her reading the newspapers.

The landing of the Spanish fleet and the storms with which it had been assailed prevented Fleurette from sleeping. At the first victory gained over the Moors she was with difficulty prevented from illuminating her shop. But now her joy was still greater.

It was said that General Prim and his *aides-de-camp* had distinguished themselves. In carrying a redoubt the duke d'Olona had been wounded, but his wound was not dangerous: peace had been made and the duke could not be long in returning to Paris.

Another happiness: Clotilde had already many times spoken of her excellent brother's desire to return to France before his death, in order to admire Paris, the new city which was the marvel of the world.

Jean d'Auray was finally able to realize this wish. The presence and care of his dearly beloved sister had restored him to health, gaiety and almost youth; he at first walked leaning on Clotilde's arm, but could soon do so without any assistance. He felt able to make the voyage and his physician had given his consent to it, wherein he had shown his sense for his patient was a man capable of going without permission. So one can imagine Fleurette's joy and astonishment when a letter dated *Havre* and signed *Clotilde* apprized her of the arrival of Jeanne d'Auray and her brother and begged her to at once engage them an apartment in Paris.

One hour later this commission had been executed. Fleurette had a magnificent apartment at the *Hotel du Louvre*, where three days later she embraced her god-mother whom she overwhelmed with caresses and questions without forgetting M. Jean, who was conquered by Fleu.

rette's first glance. The old gentleman merchant already knew from his sister Fleurette's history, he regarded her as one of the family; and would have believed something lacking from his toilet if his button-hole had not every morning been ornamented with a bouquet brought by Fleurette. From the first day after his arrival Jean d'Auray occupied himself in going over Paris while the two women occupied themselves in talking of Fernand.

"He loves you, god-mother," cried Fleurette; "he loves *you* now!"

"Yes, but not with *the* love," said Clotilde sadly.

"With *real* love, I maintain it."

"No, no; he will never love me again as he did when I was beautiful."

"In the first place, god-mother, you are very beautiful *now:* the red spots are entirely gone, the skin is united and smooth, and you have acquired a slight *embonpoint* which is marvellously becoming to you and which has made most all of the traces of the scourge disappear; those remaining do not amount to more than beauty spots here and there which give expression to the face. And besides, the beautiful Giuseppa has given him a dislike for simple beauty, and after what he last wrote to me I can easily see that she who calls herself Jeanne d'Auray and no one else is the only one he loves."

"Ah!" said Clotilde, shaking her head, "if mademoiselle de Kéroualle could appear as she formerly was before his, eyes Jeanne d'Auray would very soon be forgotten."

"That is a mistake."

"What makes you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Ah! if you could only make me believe it!"

"Nothing more would be wanting to your happiness, god-mother?"

"Nothing!" said Clotilde.

"Eh, well!" replied Fleurette with a prophetic air, "this conviction I will give you, god-mother."

That same evening Fleurette received from the duke a letter dated on the frontier of Spain; it contained only these words:

"In two days I shall be at Bordeaux, where I shall

remain a week. If you have any news from New Orleans write to me *poste-restante*."

Fleurette had a plan which she thought ought to succeed: she was not a girl to throw away a chance, however absurd or rash it might appear. She acted on her inspiration and, without speaking of it to her god-mother, she wrote the duke d'Olona a letter in conformity with her present idea.

Some days later Clotilde was seated with her brother in their parlor at the *Hotel du Louvre;* it was evening and they were speaking of their mutual happiness, that is to say of Clotilde's, for Jean, restored to life by her devotion, lived for her. Clotilde was his sister, his daughter, his whole family; she had confided to him her immost thoughts, including her love for d'Olona, and he rejoiced in her joy or grieved over her sorrow, as he also hoped when she hoped. Clotilde had related to him for the tenth time at least the details of their marriage, so unfortunately broken off, her departure for Nancy to see her aunt Beatrix, her grief, Fernand's last *adieux*, and his mother's ring which he had given her at parting—this ring which she so often put to her lips, for now that he was far away she dared to wear it.

All at once a door opens and a domestic announces M. le duc d'Olona. A young man rushes into the apartment, Clotilde utters a cry and collecting all her strength tries to repress her emotion and not lose consciousness, while she murmurs these words:

"My brother—M. le duc d'Olona!"

"It is scarcely necessary that he should be presented to me," said Jean frankly. "Although we have never before seen each other, monsieur le duc, it seems to me as if we were already acquainted."

Fernand grasped Jean's hand. He could not speak he was so greatly overcome. His appearance was as distinguished as ever, but he was prouder looking and manlier. His face was brown and there was visible on his forehead a scar, the reminder of a cut from a yataghan, which rather improved than disfigured his looks. On perceiving this scar, slight as it was, Clotilde could not refrain from tears, and Fernand, regarding her with a proud and happy look, cried:

"Am I worthy of you, my friend?"

She offered him her hand, which he seized with an ardent expression of tenderness. He loved this time with a strong and durable love for he was no longer captivated by the vanity of the eyes or delirium of the senses, but through gratitude, the heart, the mind and the judgment.

"Monsieur," said the duke, turning to Jean d'Auray, "I have just received a strange communication, in regard to which however I have already taken my resolution; but I intend making it known to you, monsieur, and to mademoiselle, your sister, as a thing which concerns me and will therefore, I am certain, not be indifferent to you, who are my friends."

Clotilde glanced at her brother with a disturbed air, and then all three sat down and Fernand continued in the following terms:

"On arriving at Bordeaux, where I was to have remained a week on personal business, I found a letter from Fleurette, directed *poste-restante*, in which she informed me that M. Jean d'Auray and his sister had arrived in Paris and were at the *Hotel du Louvre.*

"I read no further, but gave orders for my departure and at once put myself *en route.* Then only, I finished Fleurette's letter; the end of it is strange, inexplicable and difficult of belief. But she who wrote it is an honest girl, and her devotion to me is so well known that to doubt her would be criminal, and I should never forgive myself if I did so. Here is this letter."

He handed it to Clotilde whose astonishment increased each instant. She took the letter with a trembling hand. It was indeed in Fleurette's hand-writing, and in a voice of emotion she read what follows:

"I now come, monsieur le duc, to a strange event, the details of which I will give you later on, but concerning which you must be somewhat informed before you return to Paris.

"You have not forgotten the horrible catastrophe which deprived you of mademoiselle de Kéroualle, *your* intended and *my* well beloved god-mother; nor have you forgotten the statement of the railway—employé at *Vitry-le-Francais* who assured you that mademoiselle de Kéroualle had

left the car which was destroyed long before the accident, and was probably still living—"

Clotilde stopped here, speechless, not knowing what Fleurette was aiming at nor what was her design.

"Please continue," said Fernand."

"The railway employé told the truth monsieur le duc mademoiselle de Kéronalle, your *fiancee*, my god-mother, still lives: I have seen her, and she is more beautiful than ever—"

Clotilde only now understood Fleurette's project. She commenced to tremble: but she had the strength to go on:

"If you ask me, monsieur le duc, why she has let such a rumor get abroad and why she did not hasten to undeceive you, you who loved her, in regard to the false report of her death, I will answer that in acting thus she was more than ever worthy of your esteem and affection; that she had only the most praiseworthy and noble motives: I will prove this to you and you will yourself acknowledge it."

"No!" cried the duke, interrupting her, "whatever may be the reasons she gives me I will never forgive such a silence. I think, mademoiselle, and you will probably be of my opinion, that such a proceeding, however they may try to justify it, gives me the right to withdraw my word and break off the union agreed upon between us."

"Would you break with her?" murmured Clotide, her heart almost bursting with joy; "with her who they say is so beautiful?"

"She is not so beautiful in my eyes as you are!" cried Fernand warmly; "for you are the one I love, the one I prefer above all!"

And then addressing Jean d'Auray, he said, seizing Clotilde's beautiful hand:

"Monsieur, I pray you to grant me your sister's hand, without which I can never be happy. And at this moment, Jeanne," addressing his *fiancee*, "my only regret is that I cannot place on one of these charming fingers my revered mother's ring—the ring that she left for me to give after her death to her daughter, my wife."

On uttering these words he looked at Jeanne's hand and remained stupified on recognizing upon it the engraved ring

and the precious stone which a year before he had put on the finger of Clotilde de Kéroualle. He stood upright and speechless, holding Jeanne's hand in his own, and his eyes asked an explanation of this mystery, when suddenly the door opened.

A shout of laughter announced Fleurette, who threw herself into her friends arms gaily crying out at the same time:

"Monsieur le duc!"—My god-mother!"

"*Your god-mother*!" repeated Fernand, beside himself, "your god-mother!"

"Always, monsieur le duc, she has always been that."

That entire evening was spent in explanations between the duke, Clotilde, the count de Kéronalle and Fleurette, explanations often recommenced and always listened to with new surprise and fresh interest.

Fleurette asked when the marriage would take place. The others were thinking of the same thing, but she alone dared speak of it.

Until that day, at a date much too far off to suit her. Fleurette occupied herself constantly with her god-mother's trousseau; she was her waiting-maid and had but one idea; to make her god-mother beautiful. She wished that Clotilde should re-enter the world at the earliest possible moment, but the latter declined. It was not until the evening proceeding her marriage that she appeared *en grande toilette* in the *salon* of the duke d'Olona, her *fiance*. The old physician at *Vitry-le-Francais* had told the truth: little by little time had effaced the least traces of the scourge. She was no longer the Clotilde of former days, but was another who had an attraction and beauty of her own. Each day however restored, if not her first brilliancy, at least charms which more and more recalled her former appearance. So much so that Fleurette, regarding her with satisfaction, would often say:

"It is astonishing, god-mother, how much you resemble yourself!"

What more shall we say? Do we need to continue this recital? True happiness is not told. But if you desire to know what has become of those who figured in the commencement of this history it will be much easier for me to satisfy you.

Madame la marquise de Kéroualle at last succeeded in marrying off her third daughter in Brittany. Comte Jean de Kéroualle, ex-merchant, has had the honor of informing her of the marriage of his sister, Clotilde de Kéroualle, with M. le duc d'Olona. The marquise and her family were greatly moved at the resurrection and return of two relatives in whose loss they had taken so much interest.

There is also another old acquaintance of ours. William of Shaffhousen, Fleurette's friend and correspondent, William the porter, whom we have somewhat neglected, but whom Fleurette did not forget. She frequently wrote to him. She very well remembered that the good William had formerly asked her in marriage and that she had promised to give him an answer in two years. These had expired and Fleurette had not yet come to any decision. It was at the period when France and the Helvetian republic were in difficulties over Chablais and Fancigny, and Fleurette had found that an annexation to Switzerland offered her no less difficulties, when one morning she received a letter from William.

"I am lost," said she, "he is going to summon me to keep my promise!"

The worthy and excellent Swiss had too much sense for that. He had comprehended that Fleurette was too brilliant for him; that she was a hot-house flower, and not one belonging to the mountains. So he had espoused a brave fellow country woman from the shores of Lake Constance. He made this known to Fleurette, gave her back her promise and asked to still retain her friendship. Fleurette, much moved though more than content, responded in a letter so devoted and tender that poor William almost regretted his marriage: she joined with the letter a superb present for his wife.

As to the other aspirants to Fleurette's hand, there were so many we haven't space to speak of them all.

The oldest, the first, Etienne, Michelette's brother, has become neither a better fellow nor a better workman; ambitious, without ceasing to be idle, he seeks every way to enrich himself without having to do anything. He has made a marriage, not one of reason, nor a rich one, but one of despair! he has espoused mademoiselle Charlotte, the former pretty flower maker of the *rue Neuve-Coguenard* who is

about, it is said, to take the apartment formerly occupied by mademoiselle Delia, in the *rue de Navarin.*

Ludovic Durussel, whose mother's death has left him the master of a very large fortune, no longer conceals his intentions. Obstacles and refusals have only increased his passion love has silenced his vanity, and he now loves Fleurette to such an extent that he boldly declares his intention of marrying her if she will only consent to accept him.

"That ought to touch you," said Clotilde to her.

"It does not pain me," responded the coquette, "but that is no reason for my accepting him. I will see."

"Ah!" cried Clotilde, "if you had eyes you would have remarked one who really loves you: Urbain Rémy."

"You think so, god-mother?"

"He says nothing, perhaps he never will," replied the duchess, "but I have heard of words of his which came from the heart." And she related how Urbain, pushed to his last intrenchments and obliged to choose between his mother and Fleurette, would have saved the former and died with his beloved.

"Ah!" quickly said Fleurette, "that is nobly said."

"And does it decide you?"

"No, god-mother," said she, blushing, "no—I will see—I will reflect—there is enough time—I like the affection of friendship, and care for no other, and the more I question myself the more it seems to me that there are only two persons in the world to whom I have really given my heart."

"Who are they?"

"You first, god-mother, as you very well know."

"And the other?"

"The other?" Fleurette threw an almost imperceptible glance towards where Fernand was standing, tears shone in her eyes, but she laughingly answered her god-mother: "The other——*I will not tell.*"

THE END.

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